Beyond the gender (dis)empowerment dichotomy : the double-faceted role of mobile phone use in gender struggles of Chinese female rural-urban migrant workers

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**NANYANG
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UNIVERSITY**
SINGAPORE

**BEYOND THE GENDER (DIS)EMPOWERMENT
DICHOTOMY:
THE DOUBLE-FACETED ROLE OF MOBILE PHONE
USE IN GENDER STRUGGLES OF CHINESE
FEMALE RURAL-URBAN MIGRANT WORKERS**

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INFORMATION**

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MIGRANT WORKERS**

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A thesis submitted to the Nanyang Technological University in partial
fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2019

Statement of Originality

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research, is free of plagiarised materials, and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution.

...16th September, 2019... ..

Date

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Supervisor Declaration Statement

I have reviewed the content and presentation style of this thesis and declare it is free of plagiarism and of sufficient grammatical clarity to be examined. To the best of my knowledge, the research and writing are those of the candidate except as acknowledged in the Author Attribution Statement. I confirm that the investigations were conducted in accord with the ethics policies and integrity standards of Nanyang Technological University and that the research data are presented honestly and without prejudice.

...16th September, 2019... ..

Date

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Authorship Attribution Statement

This thesis contains one paper accepted at a book chapter, and two papers under revision in the following peer-reviewed journals.

Chapter 2 that comprises of literature review is accepted as one chapter of the forthcoming Oxford Handbook of Mobile Communication, Culture and Information:

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Chapter 4 & 5 that comprise of findings and discussion are revised into papers under revision of the following journals:

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negotiation of *Dagongmei*. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*.

The contributions of the co-authors are as follows:

- I structured the original idea as well as wrote the manuscript.
- Assoc. Prof. Arul Chib provided thinking directions and writing suggestions, as well as helped with revising the manuscript.

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Summary

Over the past two decades, the global diffusion of the mobile phone is accompanied by its deepening integration into varied aspects of daily life and work of socially marginalized women of the developing nations. Great attention has been subsequently drawn to the gender impacts arising from these women's mobile phone adoptions and practices. The extant scholarly discussion has trended towards a gender (dis)empowerment dichotomy – equating the phone either as the empowerment tool that generated the immediate arrival of gender equality, or the threat towards reinforced patriarchal oppression.

However, this prevailing dichotomy embodies a static nature of viewing these marginalized women in the binary of either feminist agents capable of deploying the phone for overt resistances, or powerless victims whose mobile practices centered on fulfilling traditional gender expectations. This dichotomy exhibits its theoretical limitation in examining mobile phone use by the group of female rural-urban migrant workers in the context of reformed post-Mao China. The encounters between the authoritarian socialist regime and western capitalist modernity at the societal level contribute to the continual gender struggles of these migrant women between obedience to traditional gender norms and the pursuit for modern desires. Therefore, beyond the dichotomy, it becomes necessary to capture the contextually situated and dynamically negotiated role played by the phone in these struggles.

The intersectionality perspective (Brah & Phoenix, 2004; Collins, 2002; Crenshaw, 1989; Hooks, 1981), bridged with theory of structuration (Giddens, 1984), provide this thesis with a lens to examine the role of the mobile phone in the interactions between the agency of women to get empowered, and their

situated social structures. Qualitative data drawn upon interviews with forty-three female migrant workers, and observation extending from their workplace, living spaces, to mobile spaces, allowed this thesis to unfold the double-faceted role of mobile phone use that simultaneously constrains and empowers women, across their personal and professional spheres.

To specify, mobile phone use enables the reinforcement of social structural constraints to suppress women's agency through three progressive steps – identification, surveillance, and intervention. The progressive nature of the steps arises conceptually from the increasing levels of intrusion and control, rather than as a sequential series. First, the channels required to identify women are enforced. Next comes surveillance, the close observations of women's daily gender practices. Finally, the mobile-enabled intervention aims to place women under absolute control.

There is an opposing process in contradiction with that of intersectional socio-structural forces depressing agency. This thesis proposes the second part of the theoretical framework in which agency acts on structures via mobile phone use in four successive ways – avoidance, accommodation, personal development, and collaboration. Rather than strictly following a chronological order, the sequence reflects the successively strengthened agency of women to strive for freedom in expression and personal choices. In its simplest form, avoidance is a means of protecting oneself from surveillance and control without confrontation. However, when one cannot avoid, accommodation is a strategy where obedience is superficially manifest as a moral cover to justify one's pursuit of personal interests and desires. Closely accompanying this lies the engagement in personal development. Finally, collaboration clusters individuals in small groups to share

social and informational support, moving towards the emergence of collective female power.

The constraining yet empowering processes arising from mobile phone use are observed as socially catalyzing gender transformation of these marginalized migrant women in China across individual, interactional, and institutional levels. At the individual level, mobile phone use facilitates women's embrace of self-consciousness. The mobile mediated connection further leverages the individual shifts into interactional-level collaboration, which in succession engages women into the discursive and practical construction and negotiation of their unique gender culture. The institutional structural transformation exhibits an asymmetry of "continuity and change" (Tacoli, 1999: 658). While the continuity lies in mobile practices that sustain structural rules via facilitating access to women for a further imposing of surveillance and intervention, the change stems out of women's mobile phone use to alter and re-shape their situated institutional structures with the purpose of addressing their discursive power and decision-making power.

In general, the theoretical implication of this thesis goes beyond the context of post-Mao China to advance literature upon the encounters between the globally diffused mobile phone and socially marginalized women of vast developing nations, whose gender construction trajectories, akin to these Chinese migrant women, have been tremendously re-shaped by the clashes and convergences between traditionally rooted social orders and globally penetrated western capitalist modernity in their local contexts.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

The new millennium has witnessed deepening integration of information and communication technologies (ICTs), especially the portable mobile device, into varied aspects of daily life and work of women on the margin of Global South (Ling and Horst, 2011). Traces of the mobile phone can be found in the establishment of business networks by female fishmongers and processors in Dakar (Sane & Traore, 2009); Moroccan women's fighting against gender violence (Tafnout & Timjerdine, 2009); collaboration between Midwives in rural Indonesia with doctors for the delivery of maternal health care (Chib & Chen, 2011); practices of maternal duties by overseas Filipina domestic to their left-behind children in hometowns (Madianou & Miller, 2011). This technological integration was accompanied by heated debates over the gender impacts arising from adoption and use of the phone by these marginalized women in their usually patriarchal socio-cultural contexts.

Fragmentary studies, when pieced together, have trended towards a prevailing gender (dis)empowerment dichotomy. While one set of studies (see Ahmed, Islam, Hasan, & Rahman, 2006; Huyer & Sikoska, 2003; Kyomuhendo, 2009) suggested mobile adoption and usage as the guarantee of gender equality, the opposing strand (see Hossain and Beresford, 2012; Munyua, 2009) emphasized the perpetuation of structural hierarchies that would prevent mobile practices by women from making any impact upon their marginalized experiences, aside from disempowering them further to patriarchal surveillance and control. However, building upon a binary reading of women as either feminist agents or powerless victims, this dichotomy exhibits its conceptual limitation when interpreting the role of mobile phone use

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by Chinese female rural-urban migrant workers which is integrated in their ongoing and fluid gender struggles.

Migration of these Chinese women occurs as a unique social consequence of the embrace of western capitalism and the market economy within the socialist regime in post-Mao China (Holton, 1985; Lin, Cai, & Li, 2003). While being driven to urban areas to fulfill the tremendous demand for the cheap labor force in labor-intensive industries, they are faced with social exclusions preventing them from settling down and integrating in host societies. While there is lack of policy to grant them equal welfare system and social security as compared to local citizens (Wong, Li, & Song, 2007), the market economy plays an invisible hand in limiting their upward social mobility, which largely entraps them to the margin of urban areas (Wallis, 2011; Zhu, 2007). Therefore, they are likely to be entrapped as “floating populations” (*Liudongrenkou* 流动人口) (Li, 2006, p. 194), with confined physical as well as social mobility between rural and urban China. This further involves them in constant gender struggles between the pursuit of modern desires and constraints from traditional gender norms (Gaetano, 2008; Jacka, 2005). While migration deviates them from traditional gender trajectories and allows for their unprecedented exposure to modernity in urban settings (Gaetano, 2008; Ma & Cheng, 2005), social structural forces keep on drawing them back to tradition (Peng, 2005; Shen, 2016).

It is within this context that a more fluid perspective is demanded to probe into how the role of the mobile phone can be socially constructed and dynamically negotiated amid the gender struggles of these marginalized women in China. To fill the gap, I conducted a qualitative study in a canned fruit

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processing factory located in Northeast China across the years of 2015 to 2016.

Giving female rural-urban migrant workers, this thesis unfolds with the
constraining, yet empowering processes brought about by mobile practices that
play a part in catalyzing gender transformation across individual, interactional,
and institutional levels.

Chapter 2 Literature review

2.1 Technology and gender and in China

Neither techno-determinism nor essentialism can define the historical development of the relationship between technology and gender in China. On the one hand, women's adoption and use of technology would hardly result in their immediate obtainment of gender equality. Meanwhile, essentialism that equates women's technology usage as repeatedly practices of traditionally defined gender norms also fails to capture the rather complicated picture. Instead, gender impacts arising from women's interactions with technology are deeply embedded into the societal shifts of the state across its multiple axes of politics, economics, and culture. The alternate clashes and convergences of tradition and modernity along the historical line of China are always accompanied by the constantly evolving role played by the technology in women's gender construction and negotiation processes, in their personal lives and professional development.

2.1.1 Alternate clashes and convergences between tradition and modernity

2.1.1.1 Imperial China (200BC-1911): Technological empowerment within Confucian patriarchal orders

In Imperial China, the interactions between technology and gender were enacted within the patriarchal hierarchical system defined by Confucianism. Confucianism, as a hegemonic ideology throughout the course of traditional and feudal Chinese society (from 134BC to 1911), framed the power relationships between people at an individual level, as well as the social power hierarchical structures, ranging from family to the state (Dutton, 1992;

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Winfield, Mizuno, & Beaudoin, 2000). Gender, as a significant dimension of the power relationships, legitimated men with the dominant positions, and contrastingly, restricted women to subservience (Gao, 2003). Confucianism praised “three obediences” (*Sancong* 三从) (Chan & Leong, 1994, p. 273), which encouraged the unconditional docility and compliance of an unmarried woman to her father, a married woman to her husband, and a widow to her son. Additionally, women were subjugated to practices of “four womanly virtues” (*Side* 四德) (Chan & Leong, 1994, p. 273), who had to yield their virtue, language, appearance, and skill in daily social interactions to male interests (Elvin, 1984).

It is within this context that gendered labor division occurred in the form of “men rule outside, women rule inside” (*Nanzhuwai, Nüzhunei* 男主外, 女主内) in traditional Chinese families. Confucianism confined the professional sphere as the male space (Ahrentzen, 1992; Wolf, 1974), where men were delegated with the autonomy and authority to work outside as major breadwinners. Contrastingly, women, being “the person inside house” (*Neiren* 内人) (Entwistle et al., 1995, p. 36), were merely allowed to engage in domestic obligations and other manual work, mainly textile production including weaving and embroidery, within the inner space of their households.

In this phase, women’s adoption and use of technology were largely embedded in the social, political-economic, and cultural orders underpinned by the dominant ideology of Confucianism (Bray, 1998). “Technology is a form of cultural expression” and “plays key role in the transmission of ideology” (Bray, 1997, p.369). To illustrate, studies revolving around the technology and gender

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relationship against the backdrop of Imperial China focused on the technological innovation in the textile industry and its ensuing gender impacts (Bray, 1997; Fong, 2004; Xue, 2016). The extant scholarly discussion can be divided into two eras, with the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644 AD) as the watershed, when the seeds of capitalism began to sprout in Chinese society (Balazs, 2008).

Before Ming dynasty, the new spinning wheel was introduced by Huang Dao Po, a female Shanghai native (1245-1330 AD) (Li, Li, & Yang, 2012). It had three spindles, which broke down the technological limitation of the previously dominant one-spindle wheel and allowed women to use both their hands and feet to keep the wheel spinning. This technology resulted in women's largely increased productivity, which in turn granted them improved economic sources, and meanwhile their upward shifted perception of their devalued professional abilities. Xue (2016) proposes that this technology-driven economic empowerment to women played a part in re-writing the gendered social norms under Confucianism. Especially, Xue states that re-evaluation of women's work would lead to the collapse of the ideological perception that men were greater breadwinners and more capable in professional terms. However, this argument is challenged by the historical fact that women were merely empowered within the socially and culturally determined gendered labor division (Bray, 1995). Their labor force participation remained to be limited to in-door reproduction activities, and their subordinate status to men continued. In other words, their individually and economically empowered agency kept on being yield to male-dominant decision-making power across interpersonal, familial, and societal levels.

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Such situated technological empowerment became more evident in Ming dynasty and lasted till the end of Imperial China. As noted, Ming dynasty witnessed the emergence of capitalism in China, which was, in fact, hundreds of years ahead of the introduction of western capitalist modernity in late Qing dynasty (Balazs, 1960). It is within this era that the textile industry, which previously remained as manual work mainly based on the domestic unit, started its commercialization and large-scale production in urban workshops (Bray, 1995). Almost at the same time, men began to master control over the technology. Male merchants and weavers took over the dominant networks, leaving women only with the despised, tedious work cocoon growing and cotton (Bray, 1997). Therefore, the technological innovation in the textile industry in Imperial China, which might transiently help women's pursuit of modern economic freedom, again, became tools of men to exhibit their power and extend their gendered superiority.

2.1.1.2 Republic of China (1912-1949): Technology and class differentiation

The phase of the Republic of China was characterized by the influx of western capitalist modernity. In fact, in the late Qing Dynasty (from 1840 to 1910s), the wave of western capitalist influences had already started. At that point, Imperial China awakened from the dream of a celestial empire and realized the necessity of learning western science and technology to achieve prosperity and modernization. Westernization Movement (*Yangwu yundong* 洋务运动) (Lai, 1993) was thus initiated to serve the purpose. However, with the slogan of “making use of aspects of Western civilization while using Chinese learning as the essence” (*Zhongti xiyong* 中体西用) (Ding, 1994, p. 101), this

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movement still tried to retain Confucian ideology in the wake of adopting science and technology from the western world. It eventually ended up in failure, paired with the termination of the Imperial era.

The following the Republic of China experienced the May Fourth Movement (from 1915 to 1926), the first social movement marching towards full implementation of western capitalist modernity, alongside eradication of Confucian elements (Ip, Hon, & Lee, 2003; Schwarcz, 1986). This was primarily reflected in the nationwide introduction of advanced western science and technology (Anagnost, 1997). Compared to late Qing, the adoption and use of technology under this movement aimed to underpin the fundamental transformation across the political-economic as well as socio-cultural dimensions of the Chinese society. This subsequently engaged China into the trajectory of rapid industrialization and modernization towards embracing modern ideologies and democratic systems embodied in western capitalism (Chen, 1970). Therefore, technology became a significant factor in shaping and altering the gender ideologies and practices of Chinese women. However, the technology driven gender impacts tended to show class difference (Leung, 2003).

On the one hand, the nation-wide adoption of technology involved women from the urban (upper) middle-class in the first women's movement for the societal promotion of gender equality. This movement, as part of the May Fourth Movement, challenged the patriarchal Confucian ideology and further advocated equal gender rights. The term “modern women” (*Xiandai Funü* 现代妇女) or “new woman” (*Xinniüxing* 新女性) emerged for the first time to refer to “politically aware, patriotic, independent and educated” women (Edwards,

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2000, p. 116). In the personal sphere, this movement supported independent decision-making power of women concerning their personal life, such as dating and marriage (Chen, 1970). Its influences were also extended to women's engagement in the public sphere. Women were encouraged to receive education, getting exposure to knowledge in respect to technology and science, and further transforming professional knowledge into their participation and contribution at work (Chen, 1970). Throughout this period, traditional Chinese ideas of gender have changed considerably. Some women have even gone aboard to study in technical fields. As a result, new technologies and public discourse about them reconstructed the gender images of women, including women as nurses, doctors, and teachers (Zhang & Liu, 2015).

On the other hand, a contrasting picture illustrated the struggling lives of women from lower social classes, including those at the bottom of urban societies and rural female peasants. Their interactions with technology were accompanied by their transformation into workers who were regulated into the capitalist mode of production in factories owned by domestic and foreign capitalists (Hershatter, 1993; Honig, 1992). It is worth noting that, the embrace of modernization and industrialization processes by the Republic of China led to the emergence of thriving labor-intensive industries, which were mostly invested by foreign colonizers and burgeoning domestic magnate capitalists (Faure, 2006). Tremendous women on the margin of Chinese society left their domestic sphere to join these industries as factory workers, undertaking heavy workloads in limited working environments. Honig (1992) in her book *Sisters and Strangers* notes the work and living conditions of marginalized women serving in Shanghai cotton mills, which presented as a precious record of that

historical period. She documents women's engagement in machine operation and manual work in "warm, noisy and dusty" room (p.44). It is important to note that, in Honig's book, although the nascent class-consciousness was observed to be embraced by these factory women, their consciousness in respect to individual interests and desires seemed to be absent, let alone the gender consciousness at a collective level.

2.1.1.3 Mao's regime (1949-1976): Technology and "degenderization"

The establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 terminated the Republic China, which transferred Chinese society into Mao's regime. In this regime, the Communist Party under the leadership of Mao became the single ruling party. Mao's ideology, adapted from combined Marxism and Leninism, acted as the authoritarian ideology, which was subsequently evolved into the personality cult in the Cultural Revolution (1966 to 1976) (Gao, 2008).

Mao's ideology engaged the Party in purging remnants of both traditional and capitalist elements from Chinese society. On the one hand, the Party drew a line between the PRC and the traditional feudal Chinese society, aiming at the erasure of the impacts from Confucianism and other lines of traditional culture upon Chinese society (Kissinger & Hormann, 2011). On the other hand, faced with a rising global bi-polarized competition between Soviet-led socialist countries and US-led capitalist countries, the Party aligned itself with the socialist camp, strictly boycotting western modernity alongside the market economy (Chen, 2010).

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Instead, the focus of this phase lay in uniting the nationwide collective power for socialist production and construction, with an eventual goal of eliminating class-based differences and inequalities that had dominated China for thousands of years (Rofel, 1999; Zhong et al., 2001). Technology became a significant part integrative to the socialist construction processes. Especially, to reach the ideal goal of surpassing western capitalist countries and realizing the modernization of China, the entire nation was equipped with the mechanization characterized by the propaganda of unreasonable rapid speed (Rofel, 1992). The planned economy, combined with the ideology of Great Leap Forward, fostered a single-dimensional public understanding of technology as merely “the material representation of huge machines and scenes of industrial activities filled with the noise of the machine” (Zhang & Liu, 2015, p.90). In general, the development of technology in Mao’s era was equated to mechanization itself.

At this time, technology facilitated “degenderization” (Zhang & Liu, 2015, p.89) of women in China. Before elaboration, it is worth noting that, different from the Republic China characterized by distinct class differentiation amongst women, Mao’s era promoted the eradication of class struggles, and echoing this call, the class issues superseded gender inequality. Under the name of promoting Marx’s gender egalitarianism, Mao made his famous denouncement that “women should hold half of the sky” (*Funü Chengqi Banbiantian* 妇女撑起半边天) (Leung, 2003). He stated that women would only be liberated from the feudalism of traditional Chinese society by devoting themselves to the national construction and development (Eber, 1976). In so doing, they would achieve the eventual goal of eliminating previously

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prevailing oppression and exploitation from capitalists, landlords, and people from other privileged social classes (Rofel, 1999; Zhong et al., 2001).

Women were thus decentralized from their individual self for national calls. This resulted in nationwide degenderization of labor division between women and men for the first time in China's history. Women were involved in the labor market on an unprecedented scale. They were even officially demanded to detach themselves from domestic caring and service to fully commit their time and efforts to socialist collective production. Mothering was even criticized as a sign of disloyalty (Chang, 1993). Such degenderization reached its climax during the Cultural Revolution. Images of women were portrayed as "iron girls" (*Tieniangzi* 铁娘子) (Yihong et al., 2006) to propagandize for the successful liberation of women. Iron girls were masculinized in both their manners of walking and dressing (Yihong et al., 2006). They were demanded to hide their sex characteristics, and to perform as masculinized labor forces who could "bear any hardship and shoulder heavy burdens with iron-like shoulders" (p. 616).

Individuals, no matter women or men, were viewed as "machine parts" (Zhang & Liu, 2015, p.90), being largely involved in the operations of machines to serve socialist China. There was an emergent group of female technicians who actively functioned as specialized brigades to sprung up in an array of industrial work sites, ranging from the electric bureau and the coal mining, transportation, petroleum, fishing, to lumber industries (Yihong et al., 2006). For instance, the propaganda described the first female train dispatcher – Xiaojun Sun, who represented "the form of new China's women", as having "stalwart body (and) robust arms" and (Chen, 2003, p.274). Similarly, the

ironized image of the first female portable steam engine operator – Wenying Fu, presented her tolerance of extremely heavy loads of production that allowed her to establish a close relationship with the technology in her charge (Chen, 2003).

Some scholars stated that the technology mediated degenderization in Mao's regime liberated women from the domestic sphere while allowing for their massive involvement in the professional sphere, thus unprecedentedly pushing forward the development of gender equality in China (Chen, 2003; Jin, Manning, & Chu, 2006). However, women's labor force participation was not built upon their own will, and instead, embodied the decentralization of self to realize the ideal communist identity. Being banned from expressing their interests and desires, they were more likely to be coerced into the transformation into "mere vessels of class ideology, sexually neutralized revolutionary militants" (Li, 1994, p. 305). The result turned out to be little changed subservient statuses of women, and the retention of a continual patriarchal presence in the structure of Chinese society (Rowbotham, 1992).

2.1.1.4 Post-Mao era (1976 till now): ICTs, nascent feminism, and renaissance of Confucianism

The death of Mao was followed by the post-Mao era. Alongside the reduction of Mao's personality cult doctrine, China of this era re-opens its door to embrace western capitalist modernity and market economy (Holton, 1985; Lin, Cai, & Li, 2003). The economic reform in the late 1970s led the socialist regime of China to pave the way for capitalism, with the Party retaining its dominant role in the background. Since then, within the nation-state, China has started rapid privatization. The Party managed to "untie" (*Songbang* 松绑) or

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de-collectivize the socialist mode of production (Yan, 2010, p. 495), privatizing state-owned enterprises to give them exposure to competition in the market economy (Hay, Morris, Liu, & Yao, 1994; Lin et al., 1998). Simultaneously, China is largely involved in globalization in the international arena, actively attracting foreign capital, technology, and management skills by providing cheap labor force and huge domestic market (Guan, 2005).

In this phase, internal forces arising from the domestic embrace of market economy and governmental support, in conjunction with external forces from foreign direct investment, lead to the take-off of science and technology, especially in the field of information and communication. Since the late 1990s till now, China has witnessed the remarkable revolution in information and communication technologies (ICTs), including the development of Internet (Zhao, 2002), telecom-equipment industry (Fan, 2006; Shih, Lin, & Luarn, 2014), mobile networks from 3G to 4G, and now dashing into 5G spectrum (Stewart, Shen, Wang, & Graham, 2011; Wang et al., 2015), e-services across various aspects (Lien & Cao, 2014), and amongst others. ICTs have been deeply integrated into day-by-day social interactions of people at the individual level, the meso-level of organization management, to the national economy and functioning of the government to implement regulation (Heshmati & Yang, 2006; Hou, 2017).

ICTs, therefore, become the tools to facilitate the development of feminist thinking in the wake of reformed post-Mao China. Political-ideological changes under the social influences from western countries are accompanied by shifted gender politics. Compared to Mao's era, women are no longer

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compelled to decentralize themselves from individual needs to satisfy the national calls. Instead, they embrace more spaces for personal choices.

Firstly, reformulated mass media system (Hong & Cuthbert, 1991), booming new media channels to seek information feeds (Cunningham & Craig, 2016), combined with the thriving consumerist culture (Rofel, 2007), enable women's exposure to opinions and different lifestyles beyond moral codes. All these modern elements work together to encourage their reflections upon the traditional gender norms while adopting the modern concepts promoting gender equality.

Additionally, one-child policy since the 1980s till 2015, to some degree, played an important part in altering women's gender status (Fong, 2002). This directly challenged the priority of sons in terms of reeving caring, love, and investment from parents. Instead, daughters, as the only child of many families, were thus able to access more social resources to receive education, which further motivated them towards the transformation into modern knowledgeable women with independent career development and income (Veeck, Flurry, & Jiang, 2003).

It is within this context that feminism starts to take shape in Chinese society. As noted, feminist thinking had appeared in the era of the Republic of China. However, it is important to note that, in that era, feminism sprouted to mainly serve the political purpose of re-dynamizing China with the western democratic system while eliminating traditional feudal ideologies (Edwards, 2000). However, feminism in post-Mao trends towards addressing the pursuit of individual happiness, echoing western and global feminist thinking via foregrounding the largely ignored social needs of women. Chinese feminists

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started to communicate ideas overseas since the 1980s, and the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 acted as the watershed to let the world hear the voices concerning Chinese women (Zheng & Zhang, 2010). Since then, China has been experiencing a continuous growth of feminist activities nationwide (Howell, 2003).

ICTs play a significant role in disseminating the social influences of feminist activities in the past few decades, helping their evolvement into cyberfeminism (Liu, 2004). Online spaces provide platforms for these activities to counterattack the existing gender-based social inequalities and promote the re-evaluation of the social status of women and their largely depressed personal preferences. For instance, thanks to the Internet, “Mu Zimei phenomenon” in 2003 (Farrer, 2007, p.10) attracted nationwide attention. Blogging of sex diaries by a woman named Mu Zimei went virus via evoking heated online debates regarding her controversial behavior opposing traditional moral codes. In 2009, the electronic weekly journal named Women’s Voice was launched to center on commenting women’s rights and gender equality, responding critically to women and gender issues reported by the mass media, and introducing the development of international women’s movement (Wang & Driscoll, 2019). Similar Internet-enabled feminist organizations include the New Media Female Network and Youth Feminist Action School that focus on delivering messages via social media, such as Sina Weibo¹. Also, #Metoo activity in China across diversified social media platforms can be noticed as one of the latest influential nationwide feminist online events. The popularity of #Metoo in China, to some degree, was catalyzed by the detention of the Feminist Five, five young

¹ Sina Weibo is the most popular Chinese microblogging website.

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feminists who were detained and accused of disturbing public order through their plan to circulate messages against sexual harassment in public transportation (Fincher, 2018; Zheng, 2015).

However, ironically, while ICTs are doing a favor for the traveling of modern feminist thoughts across the nation, it also facilitates the opposing forces – surveillance and control from the Party to restrict speech freedom and the promotion of its ideologies to consolidate the socialist regime. Before further elaboration, it is important to note the ideological transition occurring in the post-Mao era. With the purpose of compensating the vanished impacts of socialist collectivism after Mao, and simultaneously counterattacking capitalist ideological threats from western countries (Ford, 2015), the Party under the leadership of Hu rebranded Confucianism, a dominant ideology in Imperial Chinese society, as “political Confucianism” (*Zhengzhiruxue* 政治儒学) (Jiang, 2011, p. 117). Under the name of promoting Confucian idea of “benevolent governance” (*Renzhen* 仁政), later adapted into its new political slogan as “putting people first” (*Yimingweiben* 以民为本) (Cheung, 2012, p. 211), the Party re-dynamizes Confucian hierarchical orders to maintain the social stability and consolidate its political legitimacies (Bell, 2010; Holbig, 2008). Nowadays, alongside the shifting leadership from Hu to Xi, the Confucianism-centered propaganda, now intertwined with the rise of personality cult of Xi, is continuously extending its influences upon Chinese society (Luqiu, 2016).

Confucianism is observed to re-promote traditional gender norms inherent in it. Many institutes emerged to teach courses on contemporary womanly virtues (*Niude* 女德). These institutes built their disciplines upon the

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old “four womanly virtues” (*Side* 四德) to conjure up new virtues for women - “never fight back when husband beats you; never shout back when husband yells at you; tolerate everything; never get divorced” (*Dabuhuan* 打不还手, *Ma* 骂不还口, *Shun* 顺受, *Shou* 绝不离婚) (People.cn, 2014). Their courses included reciting “Confucian Analects for women” (*Nü* 女论语), “Disciplines for women” (*Nüjie* 女戒) and other Confucian classics with specific modifications for women (Yang, 2017). Although the government later took measures to eliminate these institutes due to their negative social influences, their emergence and popularity in Chinese society still, to some degree, reflects people’s recognition of traditional gender thoughts.

Additionally, the term “leftover women” (*Shengnü* 剩女) surfaced as a social label for unmarried women above twenty-seven years old (Fincher, 2014; Ji, 2015). As Fincher (2014) documents, in 2007, the term was originated from the Women’s Federation of China. The same year, China’s Ministry of Education added this term to its official lexicon. Different from the oppression upon *Nüde* institutions by the government, this term is aggressively promoted by the state media to stigmatize a growing number of urban educated single women. Although there is a growing social group of “leftover men” (Luo, 2017), these men are normally village males who are craving for marriage but facing the difficulty of finding a spouse due to their limited socio-economic status. Different from leftover men, those educated women are more likely to be deprived of their rights to stay single and independent.

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ICTs enable the censorship from the Party to facilitate the Confucianism-centered culture while depressing the growth of feminist thinking across the nation. The Party carefully filters out the circulation of any ideological information on social media that could incite discontent from the masses (Bamman, O'Connor, & Smith, 2012; Howard, Agarwal, & Hussain, 2011; King, Pan, & Roberts, 2013, 2017), only allowing for the dissemination of carefully selected voices and excluding voices against its interests and authority (Zhao, 2005). It establishes “the Great Firewall of China”² to ban Chinese people from accessing foreign websites, such as Google and Facebook (Shen, 2015, p.599). Additionally, the authoritarian control may reach individuals via mobile messaging service and nowadays other e-services enabled by mobile networks on portable ICT devices (Qiu, 2007).

Such censorship mechanism with the aid of ICTs allows the Party’s surveillance and control over feminist activities in case of their disseminated social influences disturbing the established gendered orders to further shake the ruling ideologies (Tan, 2017; Wang & Driscoll, 2019). Prior scholarship documents the ICTs enabled forces to counterattack feminism. For instance, WeChat account of Women’s Awakening – a Chinese feminist group located in Guangzhou, was twice canceled when it reported the police detention of five feminists in March 2015 (Wang 2015) and commemorated that event towards the end of 2015. On 8 March 2018, Feminist Voices, one of the most influential

² “The Great Firewall of China” is a phrase coined by Charles R. Smith in 2002 to describe Internet censorship in China, where foreign “harmful” ideas are prevented from invading the authoritarian state to safeguard its one-party rule through filtering content as well as monitoring users online” (Shen, 2015, p.599).

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feminist social media platforms in China, suffered a more devastating blow as their public accounts on both Weibo and WeChat were permanently blocked.

In summary, when scholarly thinking was critically evoked around ICTs and gender in post-Mao China, no matter emphasizing the liberating side or technology-mediated censorship to suffocate individual freedom, attention is merely drawn to those educated, urban women. However, at the same time, ICTs, the mobile phone in particular, also become integrated into daily lives and work of an emergent group of women – the Chinese female rural-urban migrant workers, whose migration occurs as a unique social consequence of transitioning post-Mao era.

2.1.2 Chinese female rural-urban migrant workers and the mobile phone

2.1.2.1 Gender struggles: Exploration of modernity, restriction from tradition

The migration of Chinese female rural-urban migrant workers, to some degree, is driven by unprecedented technological innovation and development in rapidly industrialized and digitalized post-Mao China. China's embrace of market economy since the economic reform keeps on paving the way for technology enabled industrial transformation, where the declined agricultural sector is paired with thriving manufacturing industry (Amighini, 2004). Post-Mao China thus witnesses the establishment of numerous factories across market towns, small cities, and metropolises, equipped with technologically advanced machines and modern management system (Li, 1998).

These factories, subsequently, produced a huge demand for the cheap labor force. Especially, as local citizens normally shunned these low-paid jobs in limited work conditions, it became necessary to transfer the rural population to urban areas to sustain the functioning of factories. The Party responded with dissolved household registration (*Hukou* 户口) system to break down the previously strict residential division between rural and urban populations (Chan & Zhang, 1999). The social group of "factory girls" (Chang, 2008) or "Dagongmei" (打工妹) (Pun, 1999) consequently come into being, which usually constitutes of young, single rural women at the beginning, and later involves women across a wide spectrum of age and marital status. Their gendered characteristics make them to be considered as more suitable for delicate, highly regulated manual work in the manufacturing industry that

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required patience and carefulness, thus contributing to their popularity in the urban labor market. The latest statistics show that the number of female migrant workers has amounted to around one million in 2017 (NBS, 2018).

However, migration does not guarantee their settlement and integration into urban areas. Firstly, the Party fails to provide full-fledged policies to grant rural-urban migrant workers equal social security and welfare systems as compared to local citizens (Han, 2010). Their identities typically remain as “non-local residents” (*Waidiren* 外地人) and “peasants” (*Nongmingong* 农民工) (Zhan, 2011, p. 261). To reinforce the social exclusion, the market economy plays an invisible hand in limiting their upward social mobility in urban host societies, thus largely entrapping them to the margin of host societies (Wallis, 2011; Zhu, 2007). Consequently, these women usually stay as “floating populations” (*Liudongrenkou* 流动人口) (Li, 2006, p. 194), driven to leave their rural hometowns yet facing social obstacles to become urban citizens. Their confined physical and social mobility between rural and urban China leads to their complicated gender struggles between tradition and modernity, occurring in both personal and professional spheres.

2.1.2.1.1 The personal sphere

Confucian patriarchal traditions keep on prevailing rural households, defining the subservient status of women. Although flows of ideas and lifestyles embodying western capitalist modernity are exposed to villages due to human migration, tourism, and media (Yan, 2003), traditional gender norms still show the tendency of retaining their profound social influences of disciplining daily gender practices of women to obedience and compliance. Since they were born, the son-preference ideology prioritizes the needs of male heirs of domestic

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properties (Li & Lavelly, 2003). Although one-child policy, as noted, has made impacts upon shifting the gender status of women, its influences tend to be limited to urban areas. When it comes to rural households, peasants respond with opposing strategies for the purpose of giving birth to sons to carry on their family names (*Chuanzongjiedai* 传宗接代) (Chu, 2001). Many families took gender prediction tests to abort female infants for having boys. This contributes to the extension of the son-preference ideology, which subsequently sustains the encouragement of self-sacrifices by rural daughters for the interests of their brothers while restricting their obtainment of caring, love, and investment from parents (Wang, 2005).

Additionally, Confucian values yield personal choices of rural women to parental authority, usually male senior family members. The notion of “filial daughters” (Shen, 2016, p. 519) confines them to place the priority on family interests and decisions. For instance, their choices of marriage, rather than building upon the personal will, are more likely to be “a contract negotiated between two families” (Fan & Huang, 1998, p. 230).

Furthermore, marriage tends to transfer them to the patriarchal systems of the families of their husbands. Social expectations define their obedience to parents-in-law and husbands (Liu, 2002; Liu & Chan, 1999), and unconditional commitment to domestic obligations and maternal duties, and seasonally, unpaid agricultural practices (Entwisle et al., 1995). Some of them even sank into silent endurance of domestic violence from their husbands (Liu & Chan, 1999), and deployed suicidal behaviors as a tragic response to patriarchal oppression from their parents-in-law (Liu, 2002).

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Within the patriarchal socio-cultural contexts of rural China, early migration of women in the 1980s was encountered with objections from their families and rural communities (Gaetano, 2004). At that point, the emergent capitalist impacts in urban areas evoked fears in peasants. They believed that the corruptive influence of money would brainwash young rural women and then seduce them to urban immoral activities such as prostitution. Therefore, peasants widely stigmatized that migration would lead to the adoption of decadent western capitalism, warning women that their migration would make the whole village “look bad” and “ruin her reputation” (Gaetano, 2004, p. 50). However, the substantial financial benefits sent by migrant women to their hometowns via remittance gradually altered the attitude of rural households regarding female migration (Croll & Ping, 1997; Du, Park, & Wang, 2005; Rozelle et al., 1999). This resulted in rural elites, such as village cadres, starting to encourage young rural women to migrate (Gaetano, 2004).

Migration enables rural women to embark on unprecedented experiences with western capitalist modernity. It is worth noting that, given the gradual integration of western capitalist modernity in the countryside of China (Yan, 2003), it is not their first time to touch upon modernity. However, they have never been exposed to such a close observation of and engagement in urban lifestyles, immersion into booming consumerist culture, as well as obtainment of independent economic sources. Such intimate interactions with modernity contribute to their material transformation from “rustic peasants”, in their words, into “modern girls” (Gaetano 2008, 632), who start shopping for “push-up bras and nail polish” (632), and other goods that carry symbolic meanings of modernity. They also engage themselves in cultural consumptions

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to get exposed to modern expressions of romance from magazines, novels, music, and television programs (Ma & Cheng, 2005). This consumption of modernity is often accompanied by experiments with sex, love, and marriage beyond rural moral codes (Lin & Tong, 2008). Ma and Cheng (2005) note migrant women's bold attempts at intimate experiences, such as engaging in affairs with male migrant workers to seek transient sexual comfort, as well as exhibiting close physical interactions with men in public spaces. Pun (2004) reveals audacious discussions in their dormitory concerning their curiosity, puzzles, and newly accumulated knowledge about sexuality.

However, experiences with modernity in urban host societies are meshed with traditional elements. Rural women usually carry the social expectation of their obedience and compliance when entering the labor market. For instance, the young single ones are labeled as “*Dagongmei*” (打工妹) - “*young sisters working for the boss*” (Pun, 1999, p. 1). The gendered social expectation easily exposes them to sexual objectification in post-migration lives, extending them to potential threats of sexual provocation and harassment raised by men met in urban areas (Jacka, 2005).

Meanwhile, the restricted residential rights to settle down in cities also keep on driving them back to traditional gender norms. As noted, they are likely to be restricted to a mere sojourn in urban host societies, which would be followed by the eventual return to villages. This may further contribute to the sustained social impacts of traditional gender constraints upon their personal choices, contrasting with their experiences with modernity. Fan (2004) demonstrates how women being urged to return to villages to get married when reaching a traditionally defined “marriageable age” (p. 199). Shen (2016)

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mentions senior family members continuously imposing the control upon women's spousal choices to thwart their engagement in free love.

2.1.2.1.2 The professional sphere

The rural-urban migration challenges the traditional gendered labor division within Chinese rural households. Before elaboration, it is important to reveal that, although women's confined physical mobility to the domestic sphere, their labor work transcends domestic obligations (Jacka, 2005). In Mao's era, socialist construction called upon the participation of rural women in the collective agricultural production (Gao & Ma, 2006). Later, due to economic reform in post-Mao China, the privatization of collective production made each rural household function as a production unit that could decide their own selections of crops and the trade-off in the market (Entwistle et al., 1995). Since then, rural women have widely engaged in undertaking domestic agricultural practices and agricultural side-lines, such as raising livestock (Dong, MacPhail, Bowles, & Ho, 2004). However, there was hardly any recognition of their economic contributions and professional worth, and meanwhile, their labor work scarcely made any impact upon their subservient status in households (Judd, 1990).

Migration allows rural women the chance to leave the domestic sphere to engage themselves in the capitalist mode of production (Lee, 1998; Pun, 2005). For many of them, it is their first time to work independently from their families and kinship bonded communities. Professional productivity, rather than domestic gender relations, becomes the most significant criteria to measure their work (Jacka, 2005). In addition, their labor work is financially rewarded with payment. In such working environments, some women even start to

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commit efforts towards professional development to change their destinies.

Chang (2008) details how migrant women changed jobs frequently and attended night school sessions to equip themselves with better skills in order to become more competitive in the job market.

However, modern experiences in workplaces are usually intertwined with traditional gender expectations. As mentioned, being labeled as “*Dagongmei*” (打工妹) (Pun, 1999, p. 1), migrant women carry the social expectation of docility and compliance under the capitalist mode of production. Especially, the functioning of modern factories regulates them to stay cooperative with machines, accommodating the rhythms of their body move with the rolling assembling lines, or strictly aligning each of their gestures with the rules and regulations in machine operations (Pun, 2005). Such activities usually involve heavy workloads under strict surveillance and control. Chang (2008) documents how migrant women were oppressed by “a day on the assembly line stretched from eight in the morning until midnight” (p. 45), while Pun (2005) notes down harsh words from a supervisor to humiliate them as “rough hands, rough feet” (*Cushoucujiao* 粗手粗脚) (p. 116).

The limited socio-economic status of migrant women tends to imprison them to patriarchal working environments. Being migrant cheap labor force, effective legal protection of their labor rights is usually absent, which reinforces their vulnerability to patriarchal oppression meshed with capitalist exploitation (Wong, Li, & Song, 2007). Furthermore, their limited education, professional skills, and social networks restrict them from obtaining upward social mobility (Wallis, 2011). Therefore, they are unlikely to escape from the margins of their

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workplaces, and this subsequently yield them to obedient practices that contrast with their modern desires for self-improvement.

In summary, across personal and professional spheres, migration involves Chinese female rural-urban migrant workers in continual gender struggles between traditional trajectories of being women and modern notions of individual autonomy and freedom. Especially, rather than veering into the binary, they are more likely to linger in the middle-ground, engaging in negotiating, constructing and even contesting the social meanings embodied in their gender roles and situated gender power relationships. Jacka (2005) metaphorizes the uncertainty facing these women as ongoing processes towards “finding a place” (p.51), a place of their own to harbor their reflections upon the tradition and meanwhile tentative explorations of being modern women. Similarly, Ma and Cheng (2005) compare them as “‘naked’ bodies” (p. 307), which refers to their openness to engage in the making of social norms. It is worth noting that, scholarly discussion over the contextually situated and dynamically negotiated gender struggles can no longer leave women’s use of ICTs, the mobile phone in particular, out of the picture. The unprecedented set of encounters between the phone and Chinese female rural-urban migrant workers in the last few decades is now fostering a significant dimension of technology and gender in China.

2.1.2.2. The mobile phone

The new millennium has witnessed the deepening integration of the mobile phone into daily lives and work of rural-urban migrant workers. Such ICT penetration amongst working-class people in China, firstly, arise out of the prosperity of China’s domestic handset manufacturing industry. As can be seen,

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in the 2000s, a burgeoning mobile phone market took shape in China, centering around Little Smart ³(*Xiaolingtong* 小灵通) (Qiu, 2007) and *Shanzhai* phones (*Copycat mobile phones made in China* 山寨手机) (Yang, 2015). Today, China is embracing a thriving domestic smartphone market, catalyzing competitions amongst as well as the prosperity of diversified domestic brands, including Oppo, Vivo, Xiaomi, Huawei, and so forth (Counterpoint, 2018). Additionally, the global diffusion of low-end mobile phones from overseas brands provides alternative choices to Chinese users. For instance, inexpensive Apple/Samsung phones are welcomed by Chinese migrant workers, especially the young generation in their 20s (Observer, 2013). Moreover, the popularity also comes from the constant commercialization of China's leading telecommunications with the purpose of catering to the communicative needs of customers while reducing the cost of service (Deng, Lu, Wei, & Zhang, 2010).

Against this social background where mobile technology is being meshed with rural-urban labor migration, scholarly attention has been drawn to the possible social impacts arising from the human-technology interactions. Jack Qiu is amongst the early set of scholars discussing ICTs and working-class people in China. His book -*Working-class Network Society* (2009) reveals that wide adoption and use of inexpensive ICTs (including the low-end mobile devices) by the working-class people in China give rise to their emergent network society. This network which allows the geographically spanned connectivity of informational and social support is witnessed to foster the grass-roots power amongst the working-class people. Given the advancement of

³ Little smart refers to “an inexpensive wireless technology which offers limited mobility service at the price of a landline” (Qiu, 2007, p. 903).

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China's digitalization and robotic automation process, Qiu (2018) recently coins the concept of the digital working class to capture the deepened digitalization of the working-class people capable of strategic usage of the ICT networked platforms for "a new praxis of class-conscious digital formation" (p.5).

Qiu's work, although not specifying the gender lens, sets up a theoretical foundation for the later exploration by Wallis who particularly emphasizes mobile phone use by Chinese female rural-urban migrant workers. Wallis' work (2015), departing from a socio-economic angle, embodies the critical thinking over the possible upward social mobility allowed by women's mobile phone practices. According to Wallis (2011), the mobile connectivity allowed by the phone fails to guarantee women the development of their professional networks in urban areas for strengthened social capital. The phone might not exert any positive influences upon women's shaping of their socio-economic status, given the severe social marginalization facing them in post-migration lives.

Despite the abovementioned ground-breaking scholarship, there is a lack of a specific gender angle to investigate how mobile phone use by these marginalized Chinese migrant women is related to their contextualized gender struggles with the tension between tradition and modernity. Especially, the investigation becomes necessary, as these portable ICT devices have already been found in various aspects of their gender practices based on fragmentary studies, including but not limited to their development of intimate relationships in host societies (Shen, 2016), and fulfillment of maternal duties to left-behind children (Peng, 2018). Against this backdrop, a conceptually systematic examination regarding the mobile phone use and gender construction of

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Chinese female rural-urban migrant workers becomes the unique research goal of this thesis.

2.2 Role of mobile phone use

Beyond the context of post-Mao China, scholarly attention has been widely drawn to the gender impacts arising from adoption and usage of ICTs, especially the mobile device, by socially marginalized women in the developing nations (see Madianou & Miller, 2011; Sane & Traore, 2009; Tafnout & Timjerdine, 2009). This gives rise of the establishment of a (dis)empowerment dichotomy. While one set of studies (see Ahmed, Islam, Hasan, & Rahman, 2006; Huyer & Sikoska, 2003; Kyomuhendo, 2009) suggested mobile phone use as the guarantee of gender equality, the opposing strand (see Hossain and Beresford, 2012; Munyua, 2009) emphasized the perpetuation of structural hierarchies that would prevent mobile practices by women from making any impact upon their marginalized experiences, aside from disempowering them further to patriarchal surveillance and control. In this chapter, built upon an in-depth review of extant literature, the author first elaborates this dichotomy, and furthermore, proposes the critical thinking that foregrounds the possibly left-out middle ground between the binary (see Cabanes & Acedera, 2012; Chib & Chen, 2011; Nguyen, Chib, & Mahalingham, 2017; Peng & Wong, 2013).

2.2.1 The gender (dis) empowerment dichotomy

Mobile communication research mainstreamed gender in the 1990s and early 2000s when the mobile phone just started its diffusion in these countries, and women there became early adopters (see Fortunati, 2002; Lemish & Cohen, 2005; Ling, 2001; Rakow & Navarro, 1993). This strand focused on examining how women incorporated the phone into their daily routines of “doing gender” (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 125). This term was adopted from gender studies that shed light on gendered social interactions of women and men. It

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states that people identify with their own gender identity by fulfilling normative gendered expectations, and simultaneously regulate people from the opposite sex into the other gender category. As West and Zimmerman (1987, p. 126) note,

“We contend that the ‘doing’ of gender is undertaken by women and men whose competence as members of society is hostage to its production. Doing gender involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional and micro-political activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine ‘natures’.”

Doing gender begins from childhood and lasts an entire lifetime.

Women and men recurrently internalize deeply rooted social expectations of gender to shape and alter their views and behaviors (Lorber & Farrell, 1991). Here, womanhood is constructed as being both less independent and autonomous, while masculinity is shaped as powerful and competent. Therefore, unequal gender relations that favor male authority while placing women in the submissive status are constantly generated and recreated from the processes of doing gender (Ridgeway, 1992).

Day-by-day doing gender, according to early mobile communication research, was extended to women’s mobile phone practices. Scholars emphasized how the mobile phone offered women geographically spanned communicative spaces to practice gender norms in “quite a traditional manner” (Lemish & Cohen, 2005, p. 520), as an extension of their gender behaviors in face-to-face social interactions. Women were thus able to meet up with their essentialist notions of femininity at anytime and anywhere, such as by seeking male spousal protection and instruction from a distance and carrying out remote mothering to their children (Rawkow & Navarro, 1993). Simultaneously, the phone also played a part in facilitating the construction of male authority,

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providing men with distant communicative accessibility to control women (Lemish & Cohen, 2005). Research of this phase was characterized by a tendency to frame the mobile phone use as a reinforcement of existing gender-based social inequalities. However, little attention was drawn to the agency of women that might lead to their strategic deployment of the phone to diverge from daily repeated accommodation with doing gender.

After this very early stage, this research strand evolved alongside the global extension of mobile telecommunication coverage beyond the developed world to the far-flung corners of developing nations. The mobile phone was no longer the exclusive gadget for women in economically advanced areas, but became available to women on the margin of the societies of the developing nations. Scholarly attention was accordingly drawn to the gender impacts arising from these women's mobile phone practices for day-by-day social interactions (see Ahmed, Islam, Hasan, & Rahman, 2006; Balasubramanian, Thamizoli, Umar, & Kanwar, 2010; Hilbert, 2011).

It is within this context that the dichotomous reading of mobile phone use took shape. One set of studies portrayed the phone as the empowerment vehicle. Mobile phone practices by marginalized women would engage them in the processes of "undoing gender". This term was first introduced by Butler (2004), and later used by Deutsch (2007) as a challenge to doing gender. Especially, compared to doing gender approach that sustains the day-by-day reproduction of gender-based social inequalities, undoing gender highlights women's agency that may allow for their deviation from non-reflexive habituated actions of fulfilling socially expected gendered behaviors. Deutsch (2007, p. 122) states that,

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“I propose that we adopt a new convention, namely, that we reserve the phrase ‘doing gender’ to refer to social interactions that reproduce gender difference and use the phrase ‘undoing gender’ to refer to social interactions that reduce gender difference.”

The concept of undoing gender embodies western feminist thinking that aims to promote capability and power owned by women to exhibit overt resistance against encountered patriarchal oppression, and subsequently reinvent their gender roles and transform their situated gender power relationships with men. The resultant transformation of gender power relationships would move towards equal decision-making power between women and men across personal and professional realms (Risman, 2009).

The concept of undoing gender echoes in studies within the empowerment paradigm. Especially, these studies showed the tendency of sharing resonates with feminist thinking in the western world by equating the agency of socially marginalized women of developing nations to an empowered ability to launch gender transformation at the societal level. From this perspective, mobile phone practices by women were regarded as the guarantee to an immediate consequence of gender equality (Ahmed, Islam, Hasan, & Rahman, 2006; Huyer & Sikoska, 2003). To specify, marginalized women would first take advantage of the social connectivity enabled by the phone to achieve economic empowerment, which, in succession, would provide social resources for their negotiation of improved gender status in patriarchal households and communities (Kyomuhendo, 2009). For instance, Sane and Traore (2009) note that the adoption of the phone allowed female fishmongers and processors in Dakar convenient ways to maintain professional networks and information flows, contributing to increased self-sufficiency. They argue that

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this empowered socio-economic status would further direct these women to “search for social and political emancipation outside patriarchal sociocultural structures” (p. 116). Some scholars follow up, proposing the mobile phone use providing the means to women to initiate collective feminist activities towards societal changes (Huyer & Sikoska, 2003). Somolu (2007) provides an example of mobile blogging that allowed open online platforms for women to cluster with one another, enabling their public expression of their marginalized experiences and feelings that would move towards social promotion of gender equality and empowerment in public realms.

However, the perception of mobile phone use to undo gender was faced with challenges from scholars in a later strand (Hossain & Beresford, 2012; Munyua, 2009; Svensson & Wamala Larsson, 2016; Wallis, 2011). Interestingly, these scholars echoed the viewpoint of early studies in the context of developed countries, turning back to underscore mobile phone use for doing gender. Compared to prior scholarship that highlighted the agency of women to subvert their situated uneven gender relations, this set of scholars went the opposite, arguing that the patriarchal social environment may conversely suppress women’s agency of resistance. According to them, marginalized women in their situated patriarchal socio-cultural contexts of developing nations usually had internalized traditional gender norms that sustain the functioning of socially recognized gender norms.

These norms, in turn, disciplined their gender view and behaviors to obedience and compliance, leaving them little agency to deviate from the social systems of doing gender. Their mobile phone practices were thus “embedded into larger disempowering patriarchal structures” (Svensson & Wamala

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Larsson, 2016, p. 17), facilitating their performance of traditional gender roles and power relationships. This is likely to result in disempowerment to more uneven gendered social power structures. Scholars argued that, even though mobile phone use might give rise to economic empowerment, internalized gender norms by women would possibly prevent the transformation of such empowerment from an economic perspective into upward gender status. For instance, Svensson and Wamala (2016) demonstrate that, although mobile phone use enabled market women in Kampala an increased economic income, these women could hardly convert their economic empowerment into independent decision-making power in their patriarchal households. Local culture and gender norms worked together to limit their agency to make a difference to their restricted gender status. As a result, regardless of their increased financial contributions to families, they kept on submitting money to their husbands to uphold the male-dominant conjugal relationships. Similarly, Munyua (2009) notes that social gender tradition and expectations coerced female entrepreneurs in Nairobi into the situation of undertaking double-burdens - both domestic obligations and the responsibility of making money. Under this circumstance, mobile phone use, rather than allowing them to reconstruct assigned gender roles, just provided them with the communicative mobility for a simultaneous response to business and family issues.

Some scholars went further to denote that mobile phone use of women might even play a part in reinforcing patriarchal surveillance and control imposed by those of higher patriarchal statuses. For instance, with the same emphasis upon Chinese female rural-urban migrant workers as this thesis, Wallis (2011) states that, their mobile phone use, rather than facilitating the

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establishment of useful professional networks, merely exposed them further to remote monitoring from employers beyond their working hours. A similar case can be seen between Senegalese couples under transnational marriages, where mobile phone use helped migrant husbands enforce suspicion, control, and surveillance on their left-behind wives (Hannaford, 2015).

While addressing the patriarchal social constraints faced by marginalized women in the societies of developing nations, these studies tended to view women merely as powerless victims sinking in the repeated processes of doing gender to reproduce gendered inequalities. This perspective contrasts with the perspective of mobile phone use to undo gender. In summary, the two opposing ideas in extant scholarship, built upon a binary understanding of women either as feminist activists or powerless victims, fostered a gender (dis)empowerment dichotomy in interpreting mobile phone use in women's gender construction and negotiation processes.

2.2.2 Left-out middle ground

However, the gender (dis) empowerment dichotomy shows its limitation to capture the possibly rather complicated role of mobile phone use in gender struggles of Chinese female rural-urban migrant workers. Especially, its fundamental assumption of women in the binary of either feminist agents or powerless victims fails to acknowledge the dynamic and ongoing gender struggles of these migrant women with the tension between tradition and modernity in reformed post-Mao China. As demonstrated in chapter 2.1, for these women who are caught by traditional gender norms and modern desires, their agency is likely to be negotiated between the ability to launch structural gender changes and the complete obedience. Accordingly, the gender impacts arising from their mobile phone use, rather than falling into empowerment to gender equality or disempowerment to reinforced patriarchal oppression, may possibly fall into the middle ground between the two extremes.

This research stance has found echoes in some studies, albeit limited in numbers. These studies presented their pioneering efforts to uncover the largely ignored middle ground between the prevailing dichotomy (Cabanes & Acedera, 2012; Chib & Chen, 2011; Nguyen, Chib, & Mahalingham, 2017; Peng & Wong, 2013). For instance, Chib and Chen (2011) note that empowerment allowed by the adoption of the phone to midwives in rural Indonesia could not be equivalent to the transformation of their deeply rooted patriarchal orders in their community. However, women's strategic mobile phone use significantly improved their work efficiency and allowed them to share professional advice amongst peers, thus encouraging the recognition of their own professional worth. Similarly, Nguyen, Chib, and Mahamlingam (2017) argue that, for

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Vietnamese foreign brides in Singapore, given their inferior gender, class, and ethnic identities, they deployed the mobile phone use to reinforce essentialist performances of femininity to cope with multi-dimensional marginalized experiences in host societies. Only through accommodation of themselves with traditional gender expectations of good wives could they obtain a sense of superiority as compared to socially privileged local women. In addition, studies (see Cabanes & Acedera, 2012; Peng & Wong, 2013) denote that overseas Filipina domestic workers continued to play a major role in child rearing via distant mobile communication. However, they worked closely with their left-behind husbands on phones to transfer part of the maternal duties and construct the mode of collaborative mothering.

These fragmentary studies, when pieced together, reflect the call for a contextually situated understanding of mobile phone use that is built upon an in-depth interpretation of women's agency. In other words, to which degree, they are able to deploy the phone to get empowered. To specify, the examination of their agency should be situated into a larger scheme of their situated socio-cultural contexts, considering the constraints generating from their disadvantaged social positions, and simultaneously, accessible social resources to them to construct, re-negotiate, and contest their strategic responses for personal interests and desires. It is worth noting here, their negotiation of agency might not be revolved around the sole axle of the gender power structure. Instead, other social structures that are central to their lives, such as class and(or) race/ethnicity, may all play a part in influencing how far they can go, as shown in the above-mentioned study by Nguyen, Chib, and Mahalingam (2017). To capture the situated nature of agency, this thesis

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bridges the intersectionality perspective with theory of structuration as the theoretical lens.

2.3 Agency

The intersectionality perspective, as a tenet of feminist thinking (Crenshaw, 1989; Hooks, 1981), allows the contextualized interpretation of how socio-structural constraints suppress women's agency. Additionally, the theory of structuration (Giddens, 1984), a classical sociological theory, supplements the other half of the big picture – how women act as reflexive (Beck, Giddens, & Lash, 1994) agents to make use of their accessible social resources for personal interests and aspirations to counter the constraints.

2.3.1 The intersectionality perspective

The intersectionality perspective originated from the wave of Black Feminist Criticism in the United States in the late 1980s (Brah & Phoenix, 2004; Collins, 2002; Crenshaw, 1989; Hooks, 1981). During that time, while feminist discourses only promoted gender equality for white women, anti-racist discourses just spotlighted racial discrimination against Black men. As a result, marginalization suffered by African American women arising from their simultaneous inferior gender and racial statuses fell out of both feminist and anti-racist discourses (Crenshaw, 1989). This social phenomenon gave rise to critiques from U.S. Black feminists, who appealed for the largely ignored, yet vastly unique, marginalized experiences faced by African American women (Crenshaw, 1989; Hooks, 1981). To address their sufferings, the perspective of intersectionality was introduced (Crenshaw, 1989). Within the framework of intersectionality, the compliance of being women and the racial divide that demeans African Americans, rather than producing cumulative negative social effects, were more likely to intersect each other to produce interlocking systems of oppression to suppress the agency of African American women.

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This perspective, now as a tenet of feminist thinking, has been widely adopted to capture contextually marginalized experiences of diversified, under-represented social groups of women (Haq, 2013; Pittaway & Bartolomei, 2001; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). As African American women, these women are disadvantaged because of not only their gender but also their inferior status of other social structures, such as class and(or) race/ethnicity. These structures, rather than standing separately, work together to foster multi-faceted oppression to restrict their agency in pursuit of personal interests and desires. For instance, Sokoloff and Dupont (2005) take note of how structural inequalities of race, class, and gender were interwoven to place working-class women of color in the United States in a social position vulnerable to domestic violence. Haq (2013) documents how power hierarchies of gender, race, caste, ethnicity, religion, marital status, and class worked together to expose Indian women to gendered discrimination in their workplaces. Similarly, Pittaway and Bartolomei (2001) reveal how racial discrimination and gender inequality could be woven into a biased refugee policy, resigning refugee women in Australia to the silent suffering of sexual violence.

In the context of this thesis, intersectionality provides an angle to approach intersecting socio-structural constraints central to the lives of Chinese female rural-urban migrant workers. As chapter 2.1 demonstrated, in a transitioning post-Mao Chinese society, these women are marginalized by gender and their limited socio-economic status at the same time. They are positioned to subservient gender statuses in the deeply rooted patriarchal hierarchy, facing the traditionally expected docility and compliance of being women (Fan, 2004; Shen, 2016). Meanwhile, their limited socio-economic

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status as migrant cheap labor force exposes them to the capitalist mode of exploitation (Chang, 2008; Pun, 2005; Wallis, 2011), as well as to the socio-exclusion against their settlement and integration in urban areas (Li, 2006; Zhan, 2011). From the lens of intersectionality, these two axes of marginalization tend to be intertwined to depress their agency of chasing after modern notions of autonomy and freedom while pushing them back to patriarchal social oppression.

However, while spotlighting socio-structural forces upon the agency of socially marginalized women, intersectionality also exhibits its theoretical limitation. It tends to only emphasize the restricted aspect of social structures (Makkonen, 2002; Seng et al., 2012), and therefore framing agency as a constrained consequence out of social structures. However, this perspective likely leads to neglecting of the other half of the big picture – women’s agentic responses to their faced constraints.

2.3.2 Theory of structuration

To circumvent the limitation of the intersectionality perspective, the theory of structuration (Giddens, 1984) comes into play. In contrast to intersectionality that merely addresses the constrained aspect of structure, the theory of structuration proposes the duality of structure. It advocates that structural constraints, yet simultaneously enables human agency. This duality stems out of the fact that structural properties are composed of rules and resources. On the one hand, structural rules constrain human agency, confining human actions to the trajectory of maintaining and recurrently reinforcing the current hierarchy of structure. On the other hand, resources of structure, referring to “anything that can serve as source of power” (Sewell, 1992, p. 9),

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can encourage human agency by strengthening the transformative capacity of human actions towards challenging structural rules. According to Giddens (1984), humans act as “highly ‘learned’ in respect of knowledge which they possess and apply, in the production and reproduction of day-to-day social encounters” (p. 22). Thus, humans can take advantage of structural resources to negotiate agency towards coping with structural constraints, and even transformation of the current structural hierarchy. For this reason, rather than viewing the agency as a constrained consequence of structure, Giddens (1984) suggests a mutual constitution between human agency and structure - while structure defines agency, the exhibition of agency by humans may, in return, act upon structure for their interests and desires.

A set of scholars have applied the theory of structuration to examine women’s display of agency towards challenging gender power structures in western countries (Connell, 1987; Risman, 2004). It is important to note here that, these countries, throughout their long-term modernization processes, have witnessed four feminist waves evolving immensely over hundreds of years. These waves progressed from underscore of women’s suffrage, to promotion of gender equality between women and men across the personal and professional spheres, and later appeals for diversity amongst women from different social groups (Aikau, Erickson, & Pierce, 2007; Heywood & Drake, 1997; Krollokke & Sorensen, 2006), and nowadays the #MeToo movement in online space with the purpose of resisting sexual harassment, assault, and misogyny to women (Lewis, 2018; Mendes, Ringrose, & Keller, 2018). They have deeply influenced gendered views and behaviors of women, encouraging their embrace of gender consciousness to strive for an equal decision-making power as men in both their

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personal lives and workplaces (Davis & Robinson, 1991; Rinehart, 2013). This explains why scholars in western contexts tend to read agency of women as an empowered ability to exert overt resistance towards a fundamental social transformation of unequal gender power relationships. Within the framework of structuration, Connell (1987) notes that women are able to conduct gender practices in order to turn against what constrains them. Similarly, Risman (2004) demonstrates that women can “do gender consciously, with intent, rebellion, or even with irony” (p. 433) towards a relatively equal distribution of power and rights to women and men.

However, beyond the western world, an increasing number of scholars have raised questions about whether western feminist readings of women’s agency can represent the socially marginalized women of developing nations (Hirschmann, 1998; Mohanty, 1988; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002; Zimmerman, 2015), such as that of Chinese female migrant workers. Given inferior social positions of these women in their situated socio-cultural contexts, scholars suggest consideration of the possibly limited social resources allowed for them to construct and re-negotiate their resistances (Agarwal, 1997; Ramamurthy, 2000; Sen, 1987). For instance, some scholars point out a direction of probing women’s possible “hidden” (Wang, 2007, p. 706) or “subtle” (Peter, 2003, p. 27) strategic responses to social constraints, which focus on the underground pursuit of personal needs while avoiding direct confrontations. Abdulah and Sondra (1982) document how village women in Bangladesh could only collaborate with one another or with their children to earn income sneakily, and stock savings and food behind the backs of their husbands. Kandiyoti (1988) argues that in China, incorporation of mothers-in-

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law into the domestic patriarchal hierarchy would equip them with resources to suppress daughters-in-law of a more inferior status. These prior studies, although not emphasizing the role of mobile phone use, broaden the horizon of this thesis when interpreting agency display of Chinese female rural-urban migrant workers. This thesis is able to obtain a better vision to unearth possible covert strategies of these women to cope with their contextualized struggles.

Furthermore, besides taking references from extant studies, this thesis aims to draw attention to possibly unique forms of resistance of Chinese migrant women by considering their deeply rooted collective culture (Earley, 1989; Oyserman & Lee, 2008). Emphasizing the consistency of selves with norms and characteristics of their groups, this culture historically encourages Chinese people to form collective resistance. The unique resistant culture in China is described by old sayings, stating that “law does not punish group behaviors” (*Fabuzechong* 法不责众), yet “the nail that sticks up mostly gets hammered down” (*Qiangda Chutouniao* 枪打出头鸟). This raises questions as to whether this culture will lead to the clustering of these migrant women into groups for collective resistance.

In conclusion, the theory of structuration supplements the intersectionality perspective, fostering a theoretical lens to capture the interactions between the agency of socially marginalized women and intersected socio-structures central to their lives. To understand gender impacts arising their mobile phone use demands attention to probe into how mobile phone use is embedded into these interactions. More precisely, whether and how mobile phone use further exposes women to intersected socio-structural constraints (RQ1), and in return, whether and how mobile phone use facilitates

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their enactment of strategies to act upon the constraints for individual interests and desires (RQ2). In this thesis, these questions are examined within gender struggles of Chinese female migrant workers in post-Mao China, across their personal and professional spheres.

Chapter 3 Methodology

To answer the research questions, the author conducted a qualitative study in a canned fruit processing factory. This factory was located in Paotai (炮台) economic development zone, Dalian (大连) city, Liaoning Province of Northeast China. This chapter focuses on introducing (1) the research site, especially why and how the author decided to carry out the fieldwork in the factory; (2) the data collection procedures, including building up a research team, recruitment of respondents, and the major research methods; (3) demographic distribution of respondents; and (4) processes of data analysis.

3.1 Research site

3.1.1 Dalian

Dalian is one of the economic and trade centers along the north coast of China, with a gross domestic product national rank of the twenty-second of all cities (Sohu, 2018). Please refer to Picture 1 of Appendix A to get an overview of the geographic location of Dalian. With multiple economic development zones and bonded areas, Dalian embraces flourishing manufacturing industries across a variety of fields, entailing industries of Hitech, such as biomedicine, new energy vehicles, and electronics, as well as industries of petrochemicals and fine chemicals, logistics, food and garment processing, and so forth (Chinanews, 2017). These industries create tremendous demands for the cheap labor force, which attract migrant workers from different rural areas of China to the urban area and outskirts of Dalian. Especially, a set of manufacturing industries with a specific labor force demand for female migrant workers, making Dalian a good spot to recruit research respondents for this thesis.

Additionally, Dalian allowed the convenience of obtaining research assistance. This thesis was funded by a collaborative research program between Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information (WKWSCI) of Nanyang Technological University (NTU), and Department of Journalism and Communication (DJC), Dalian University of Technology (DUT). Fieldwork in Dalian would benefit from geographical advantages provided by DUT for a better understanding of the local politics, economics and culture. Additionally, it would be convenient to recruit research assistants from DJC of DUT for data collection. In summary, the economic development, paired with advantageous research resources from DUT, allowed Dalian to stand out as the city of choice.

3.1.2 Paotai

Paotai (炮台) is located at the outskirts of Dalian, as a combination of the economic development zone and bonded area (Dlpaotai, 2018). Spanning two hundred and forty-eight square kilometres, Paotai is a sub-economic development zone belonging to “the first economic development zone of the Divine land” (*Shenzhou Diyi Kaifagu* 神州第一开发区) of Jinzhou (金州) district. The advantageous geographic location of Paotai allows its convenient land and water transportation. To elaborate, its land transportation system consists of Shengda (沈大), Hada (哈大), and Wawan (瓦湾) expressways, as well as the Wawu (瓦五) railway. Meanwhile, it is surrounded by Bohai (渤海) and Yellow Sea (*Huanghai* 黄海), enabling convenient shipping services. While Bohai (渤海) is an inland sea adjacent to Liaoning, Hebei, and Shandong Provinces and Tianjin province-level municipality, Yellow Sea (*Huanghai* 黄海) lies between China and Korea. The geographic resources contribute to the

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evolution of Paotai into one of the most significant economic development zones of not only Dalian, but also the entire Liaodong Peninsula (*Liaodong Bandao* 辽东半岛), the second largest peninsula in China in the past few decades. Please refer to Picture 2 in Appendix B - a screen shot from Google map - to visualize the geographic location of Paotai.

The political and economic transformation of post-Mao China contributed to the industrialization, urbanization and globalization processes of Paotai. In 1985, due to the economic reform to embrace the market economy, Paotai initiated its transformation from a village into a township. In June 1992, the Dalian government approved the establishment of “Dalian Paotai Economic Development Zone” (*Dalian Paotai Jingji Kaifagu* 大连炮台经济开发区), followed by the subsequent approval of the “Dalian Paotai Taiwan Businessman's Investment Zone” (*Dalian Paotai Taishang Touziqu* 大连炮台台商投资区) in 1995. In 2012, the township Paotai became one county-level district of Dalian, and in 2016 (also the time of the second fieldwork), Paotai officially became a part of the urban area of Dalian.

However, despite belonging to the urban area, Paotai presented a unique phenomenon of the peri-urban area, where modern residential districts, industrial areas, and farmland were all intersected. Such intersection led to mixed scenes of the village at its periphery, factories in its industrial area, business centers such as shopping malls, retail stores, restaurants and hotels at its core, and modern public facilities for local citizens, such as the city square and a playground. Please refer to Picture 3 to 6 in Appendix C to capture the complicated scenario of Paotai.

The privileged geographical location of Paotai, combined with its open economic policy, has attracted investment from numerous domestic and international enterprises. At present, in total, there are three hundred and eighty-five enterprises in Paotai. Twenty-seven were foreign founded, across building materials, machining processing, garment processing, and food processing industries. These industries create large demands for the cheap labor force, attracting people to relocate en masse from rural areas of other parts of China to Paotai. The total population of Paotai consists of around twenty-two thousand migrants, compared to its fifty-one thousand local citizens (dljp.gov, 2019).

3.1.3 The factory

The canned fruit processing factory is one of the leading enterprises in Paotai. This enterprise was established in the early 1990s, and registered as a private company in the early 2000s and a group company in mid 2010s. At present, with the headquarter in Paotai, this factory has developed two more branches in North and East China. Its fruit cans and other side-line fruit products are sold to an extensive market across Northeast, Middle, and East China.

The author accessed the factory via personal social network (Hollstein, 2011). Through the introduction by one acquaintance, the author established the connection with the associate manager of the canned fruit processing factory. To obtain the consent to enter the factory and conduct interviews with the workers, the author had a conversation with the manager that involved self-introduction, explanation of the research goal and methods, not in academic terms, but plain language. The author showed the translated consent form English to Chinese to prove the confidentiality of this research site as well as

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respondents, ensuring the manager that data collected from the factory would be kept anonymous. Also, the author promised that interviews would only be conducted when disruption to the normal production could be avoided.

This factory allowed a rich sample pool from which the author was able to draw research respondents. During the busy season of the factory, which happened to be the period of the fieldwork - July and August, an average of over one thousand female migrants worked there. In addition, these female workers represented different age groups, ranging from the 20s to 50s, and bore diversified marital statuses, including single, married and divorced, allowing for a collection of data regarding mobile phone use for the construction of a variety of gender roles and power relationships. Moreover, these women also came from different villages throughout China, which largely reduced the geographical bias of the data. Below is the introduction of the inner structure of the factory, with a reference to Picture 7 in Appendix D.

3.1.3.1 *Beilou*

Beilou (North building 北楼), the building of management offices, was located at the north corner of the entire factory area. Here, the planning, executing and supervising of each session of production took place, alongside all sales, human resources, and financing of the entire enterprise. As can be seen from Picture 8 in Appendix E, *Beilou* and the rest of the shop floor industrial areas were geographically divided by a road in between.

The geographic separation symbolized the social class stratification between the administrative staff in *Beilou* and the industrial workers. Furnished with ceramic tiles to present a relatively modern appearance, *Beilou* had a car park in the front with luxurious cars such as BMW and Porsche owned by the

managers. Compared to *Beilou*, the shop floors in its opposite industrial areas were in a grey tone, with their previously whitewashed walls now heavily stained (see Picture 9 and 10 in Appendix F). In the eyes of workers, *Beilou* represented a symbol of power, a place they could only drop by to ask for a leave. They thought of the officers working in *Beilou* as “*educated*” (*Youwenhua* 有文化), hence making them the group of people that they would like to communicate with least in the factory.

3.1.3.2 The industrial area

The industrial area housed four production shop floors, one shop floor of label attachment and quality inspection, and seven warehouses. Workers of all shop floors were divided into small groups of five to ten people. All groups had a group leader working under the management of shop-floor supervisors. Shop-floor supervisors acted as the mediators to connect administration staff in *Beilou* and workers in the industrial area. They passed work-related rules and standards from *Beilou* to instruct workers while reporting the progression of production work from the industrial area to *Beilou*.

During working hours, supervisors exhibited strict surveillance and control over workers, making sure about their speed, concentration, and work quality. Once a worker failed to reach the standard, the supervisor would point out the mistake and scold the worker immediately and loudly. In so doing, supervisors intended to ensure the perfect incorporation of workers into the production work. All supervisors were men, which made their capitalist mode of management intertwined with the patriarchal hierarchy to amplify the oppression upon female workers at the bottom of the factory. Picture 11 in

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Appendix G illustrates the daily scene of women working under the monitoring of a shop-floor supervisor.

Women in production shop floors were responsible for filering fresh fruits, slicing them into pieces and filling these cut slices into glass bottles. Filled bottles would then be delivered automatically by conveyor belts to a high-temperature bacterial removal room, and later stamped by machines. In these shop floors, women had to wear blue, long-sleeved uniforms, plastic gloves and plastic boots to work in ultimately hot, suffocating, noisy and humid environments. Please refer to Picture 12 and 13 in Appendix H for the work status of women in these shop floors.

The bottled fruit cans from production would then be transferred to the shop floor of label attachment and quality inspection. Compared to the production shop floors, this workshop had a slightly better work environment - less humid and hot – but was still quite noisy. Women’s tasks included attaching labels to each glass bottle manually, picking out the ones with impurities, and packing bottles into paper boxes. Packed paper boxes would be transported by forklifts to warehouses, stored in piles and then waited to be transferred to markets. Please refer to Pictures 14, 15, and 16 in Appendix I for the work scenes of women and their male colleagues in this shop floor.

It is worth noting that sex-segregation in all shop floors. Although some male workers engaged in the same work as women, some others undertook work that was only reserved to men. This type of work usually involved machine operation, which allowed them more autonomy and physical mobility, such as driving forklift to transport fruit can boxes across different shop floors, as compared to women whose bodies were confined to assembling lines or a

still space to attach labels and do quality inspection. Picture 17 in Appendix J shows one example – a male worker on the move.

3.1.3.3 Dormitories and other public facilities

The dormitories of workers were behind a large meadow and an empty activity center. The dormitories of female and male migrant workers were separated, with a gatekeeper in the reception rooms of each building. The entry of workers into dormitories of their opposite sex was banned. Within each room of around fifteen square meters, there were two bunk beds to house four roommates on a tiled floor against brushed white walls. During the fieldwork, many rooms were still under reconstruction, with their new anti-theft doors had not arrived yet. Please refer to Picture 18 and 19 in Appendix K for images of the exterior and inner views of dormitories. In terms of public facilities, there was a bathhouse beside the dormitories. A canteen stood close to shop floor areas that offered workers free lunch on workdays.

3.2 Data collection

3.2.1 The research team

The first step of data collection was to form a research team. During the fieldwork of 2015, two female graduate students from DJC of DUT were recruited as research assistants. As local citizens, they helped interpreting Dalian accent and slangs during fieldwork. In addition, as students from communication studies, it was easier for them to gain an overview of the research purpose and relevant methodological knowledge, which, in turn, guaranteed the efficiency of their assistance. Their jobs included taking note of basic demographic information of interviewees, the interview locations, and key points of interviews to foster a documentation.

As a female Chinese of her 20s and a Ph.D. studying overseas, identity of the author easily raised interests from workers who had never been abroad and many of them never heard about or met Ph.D. However, alongside the passage of time, when workers gained familiarity with the author and the research assistants, their curiosity faded away. Workers tended to take the author as a young common woman while placing less weights upon her other social identities. Especially, young female workers started to treat the author as one of their cohorts, and feel free to share their relatively private life experiences. In the meanwhile, the elder women were more likely to see the author as the young generation as their children, and thereby erasing the social distance with her. During the second fieldwork in 2016, the research team consisted of the author and one female graduate student from DJC of DUT as the assistant, who was a local and in her 20s.

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Prof. Arul Chib also joined the research team during the fieldwork of 2015. However, his presence as a foreign male easily raised attention from workers on shop floors. Due to his gender as male and race as Indian, workers tended to develop a defensive attitude towards him and gave him exotic gazes. This, in fact, only served to distance researchers from the workers ethnically, sexually, and socially. Therefore, he particularly excused himself from further participation to reduce the possible bias from respondents. He did provide technical advice concerning data collection. However, the technical advice passing from an experienced qualitative researcher merely equipped a junior one with the better interviewing skills rather than intervening the author's independent thinking and practices. Also, Prof. Chib only stayed for less than one week, as his major task was to negotiate the administrative management over the grant with DUT, instead of instructing the fieldwork. Prof, Chib did not participate in the fieldwork of 2016.

3.2.2 Recruitment

During the fieldwork of 2015, the recruitment of respondents in the initial stage relied upon personal referral. At the beginning, a male supervisor guided the author into shop floors. The male supervisor firstly brought the author to his shop floor of label attachment and quality inspection and introduced the author and two research assistants to a group leader who worked under him. The group leader then helped the author access his subordinates. The processes went as the leader asked workers to stop their work and accept interviews.

However, the author quickly noticed that such a recruitment manner automatically established a power hierarchy between her and workers. The

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author would be viewed as part of the administrative staff who were socially superior to workers. Therefore, workers might defend their privacy by providing a decorated answer rather than disclosing their true feelings and life stories. Such recruitment also interrupted their work speed and reduced their work efficiency, which led them to rush the interviews in order to go back to work as soon as possible. As a result, after two interviews, the author decided to recruit respondents in a different way.

The author began to approach some workers via casual chatting, without disturbing their tasks at hand. Introducing herself as a Ph.D. student in a university of Singapore who came here for research, the author initiated a conversation by enquiring workers what they were doing. This included topics such as, how to check the quality of bottles, which type of bottles were not qualified, how much they were paid for identifying one bottle with impurities, and other simple questions related to their work. The author also offered help to workers, engaging in simple tasks that did not require training, such as turning caps on an assembly line to make sure all caps were orientated in the same direction. Slowly, some workers began to feel comfortable with the presence of the author, and became interested in them, asking for their personal information and their reasons for coming to this factory. The author would then simply and briefly introduce her research purpose as – understanding their mobile phone use in daily lives and work, and go on to ask if they would be interested in accepting interviews. If they agreed, the author would read them the consent form under the approval of the Institutional Review Board of NTU and seek their oral endorsement, given the consideration of their limited literacy to read

the form by themselves. Please refer to Appendix M to see the original form in English and its translated Chinese version.

Snowball sampling was used to expand recruitment. After each interview, the author would ask the respondents to refer her to other workers they knew. Under recruitment, the author made sure the consideration of gender, age, marital status, and occupation of each participant, with the aim of interviewing workers of a wide range of demographics. This would allow for the capturing of a complicated picture of their mobile phone use in performing different gender roles and negotiating various gender power relationships across personal and professional spheres. After daily recruitment and interviews, the author and research assistants usually summarized the demographic information of respondents of that day and prepared interview plans for the next day.

The same recruitment method was applied to the second fieldwork of 2016. As some workers already knew the author as an old acquaintance, the recruitment was easier. They were willing to introduce the author to new workers and collaborated with her for follow-up interviews to narrate their life changes in the past year.

3.2.3 Research methods

3.2.3.1 Qualitative interviewing

Qualitative interviewing was adopted as one major research method. It included interviews with a pre-determined outline of questions for addressing the research theme, and non-structured questions that would be customized according to the specific characteristics of respondents and the context of interviews (Louise & While, 1994).

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In the structured side, the interview outline focused on three main themes: (1) the basic demographic information and migration experiences of respondents; their mobile phone use in (2) personal lives and (3) for professional purposes. This outline is attached to the Appendix N for reference. In the meanwhile, the flexible nature of non-structured questions enabled the author the autonomy to refine and adjust interview questions for eliciting the complexity and multiplicity of life experiences of different respondents (Louise Barriball & While, 1994). Especially, the author was able to capture how gender and socio-economic status intersected differently in varied contexts, exposing respondents to their contextualized mobile phone use for gender practices.

The introduction of the interview location is noteworthy here, as the space to carry out interview also plays a part in influencing the narratives from respondents (Herzog, 2005). Most interviews were conducted on shop floors. Firstly, these locations helped reduce the interruption of the work progress of respondents. Secondly, the shop floors provided a familiar environment to the respondents, allowing them a secure context to talk to the author – an outsider in their space. Moreover, shop floors also enabled privacy for respondents to disclose personal stories. Despite working under groups, respondents usually did their individually assigned tasks in separated spaces of shop floors. For instance, those attaching labels worked alone in a corner with piles of paper boxes surrounding them (refer to Picture 20 in Appendix L). Therefore, it was quite convenient for the author to conduct interviews with respondents in a bounded space of their own.

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In some cases, when the shop floor was too noisy for an interview, the author would invite respondents to space outside to accept interviews during their working intervals. Additionally, the author invited some interviews from shop floors to a more personal space - their dormitories within the factory and rented accommodation outside. This usually happened when more intimate and private questions were involved. Their personal living space made them more comfortable and easier to narrate their life experiences and feelings that were normally concealed deep within their hearts and kept shut to others.

3.2.3.2 Observation

Observation was the other research method to examine same phenomenon through a triangulation perspective (Denzin, 1970), including both participant and non-participant observation. To specify, the participant observation was conducted in workspaces of the factory, under which the author engaged herself in the production work of respondents. As noted, the author was engaged in relatively simple tasks that did not require professional training and could be practiced in a short time. These experiences allowed the author to immerse herself in the work and life environments of respondents to go deeper into the observed phenomenon to understand their real feelings, such as the tiredness of repeatedly turning over the caps along the assembly lines and checking impurities one bottle after another (Becker and Geer 1957).

Non-participant observation (Mintzberg, 1970) gave the author more freedom and autonomy to travel through different spaces within and beyond the factory, thus obtaining an overview of the work and living conditions of respondents. The author structured the observation with focuses on: (1) the scenes of different professional spaces of the factory including shop floors, and

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canteens; (2) social interactions between female migrant workers and their male colleagues, amongst female migrant workers, leaders and subordinates in different professional spaces; (3) workload, facial expressions and body movements of female migrant workers; (4) personal spaces of female migrant workers including the dormitories and rented accommodation. Notes were taken and debriefed daily amongst the author and research assistants.

Furthermore, non-participant observation was extended from off-line spaces to mobile spaces of respondents (Sade-Beck, 2004). As the author got familiar with respondents, some respondents were willing to show their mobile communicative records to the author, such as which type of mobile media affordances they often used, some of their chat records, their profile picture in mobile social media platforms. With their consent, screenshots were taken as a record for further analysis. Sample of the screenshot can be referred to Appendix O, with personal information of the respondents removed. A total of one hundred and seventy-seven photos were taken in 2015, and four hundred eighty-three in 2016.

3.3 Respondents

In total, forty-three female migrant workers were recruited as respondents from different shop floors. Encompassing both normal workers and group leaders, these women represented an age range from twenty to fifty years old, with diversified marital statuses, hometowns, and experiences of migration. In addition, the author interviewed eleven male migrant workers, four administration staff (two shop-floor supervisors, one warehouse manager, and the associate manager of the factory), and one official from the local government to better understand the power hierarchical issues. Follow-up interviews were conducted with three female migrant workers and three male migrant workers to apprehend their evolving understanding and practices of gender alongside ongoing migratory processes. Please refer to Table 1 and Table 2 in Appendix P for the characteristics of each respondent across the two-year fieldwork, and charts in Appendix Q demonstrate the demographic distribution of respondents as female migrant workers in respect to their age, hometown, work status in the factory, marital status, have children or not, and the mobile phone usage.

3.4 Data analysis

The data set of this thesis comprises of full transcriptions of sixty-five recordings of interviews, paired with ethnographic notes and photos taken during the fieldwork. Analysis of this data set entailed two stages. The first stage was open coding (Burnard, 1991), where “categories are freely generated” (p. 462). In this stage, the focus of the author lay in letting “concepts and themes emerge from the data” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 204). The author roughly categorized mobile phone use by respondents into personal and professional spheres, and then familiarized herself with the whole dataset to further look for significant similarities and differences amongst different cases.

The second stage engaged a more nuanced reading of data from the theoretical lens. This stage involved a constant comparative method (Boeije, 2002). Guided by the theoretical lens, the author emphasized searching for contradictory gender impacts arising from mobile phone use across personal and professional spheres. While doing comparison, the author took memoranda for a better categorization (Bowen, 2009). The comparison processes gave rise to four major themes and eight sub-themes. Please refer to Table 3 in Appendix R that illustrates the themes, a summary description and examples of each theme.

Chapter 4 Findings

4.1 Mobile phone use in the personal sphere

In personal lives, mobile phone use of Chinese female rural-urban migrant workers was found to both constrain and enhance their agency in negotiation with the tradition of rural hometowns, and experiment with modernity in urban areas.

4.1.1 Negotiation with tradition of rural hometowns

Under negotiation with the tradition of rural hometowns, the double-faceted role of mobile phone use lay in two dimensions. Firstly, while mobile phone use introduced women further to surveillance from family members, it also allowed their avoidance to seek concealed autonomy and freedom. Furthermore, mobile phone use facilitated the leverage of surveillance into direct intervention with women's personal choices, and simultaneously enabled women to manifest superficial accommodation with the intervention to veil their real purpose of negotiating for hidden divergence from tradition.

4.1.1.1 Surveillance vs. Avoidance

Patriarchal orders of rural households, in conjunction with social exclusions in urban areas, restricted the agency of female migrant workers to diverge from the rural trajectory of gender practices. Under deeply rooted Confucian tradition, patriarchal orders normatively positioned these migrant women to a subservient gender status, while granting their senior family members the authority to monitor their personal lives (Wolf, 1972). Although they were physically separated from rural households, their sustained peasant identities under migration upheld the social influences from these orders upon them. As noted, migrant women were usually faced with social exclusions in

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their settlements and experienced difficulties in integrating into host societies (Zhan, 2011). In their words, their “*root*” (*Gen* 根) remained in villages while their stay in cities was “*temporary*”. As a result, they were still embedded in rural communities, and thereby, continued to carry traditional expectations of women’s docile and compliant gender roles. Single women were demanded to keep in alignment with their traditional gender images as “*filial daughter*” (*Xiaonü* 孝女) (Shen, 2016, p. 591). They were supervised to marry men from “*shared common kinship networks*” (*Zhigengzhidi* 知根知底). For married women, traditional gendered labor divisions required them to succumb to surveillance from husbands over their “*daily expenditures*”, and sometimes, monitoring from left-behind parents-in-law over their fulfillment of child-rearing responsibilities.

The intersecting social constraints that pulled migrant women back to tradition were expressed through surveillance from their family members. The mobile phone was a tool of these family members to conduct surveillance from afar. Echoing extant literature (Chib, Malik, Aricat, & Kadir, 2014; Madianou & Miller, 2011; Peng & Wong, 2013), mobile phone use of migrant women played a significant role in maintaining their connections with families. As many women stated, the mobile phone was usually “*gift*” from family members, mainly males, bestowed upon them when they decided to work outside. One woman said her phone was bought by her father before her migration. Another resonated, claiming she received her phone from her husband as “*bride price*” (*Pinli* 聘礼), the token conventionally paid by men to women’s families for engagement. The gifting behavior itself embodied patriarchal exercise, as the major purpose was to allow the migrant women to “*stay connected*”, under the

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perception that “*it is not safe for a girl to work in a city alone*”. Consequently, offline gender power relationships, as prior studies have revealed (Fortunati, 2002; Lemish & Cohen, 2005; Wallis, 2011), were normally duplicated in mobile communicative spaces between migrant women and their families. They remained under surveillance from those bearing higher patriarchal status. As migrant women reported, they were usually requested to keep “perpetual contact” (Katz & Aakhus, 2002) with their families, “*every two days*”, “*every week*”, and under other intense time intervals.

It is important to note that, due to wide adoption of the smartphone amongst migrant women, the author observed that varied mobile media affordances of the smartphone and their convergences in diversified forms, could foster surveillance in different manners. Firstly, voice calls allowed surveillance to intrude into the personal spheres of migrant women at any time and any place. The dyadic characteristic of voice calls provided women with relatively private mobile communicative spaces to be “co-present” (Ling, 2008) with distant family members. Within these spaces, women could receive “*direct*” surveillance from afar over their personal lives. Additionally, due to the synchronous nature of voice calls, this surveillance occurred in real-time. As a result, women could be accessed by family members at any time. This gave rise to complaints that calls for monitoring their behaviors sometimes came “*all of a sudden*”, leaving them “*no time to prepare (response)*.” They were often asked questions such as “*where are you*”, “*what are you doing*”, “*why you did not call for such a long time*”. A woman even provided anecdotes on how her husband connected her bank card use to his phone, allowing him to receive notifications from her consumptions made with the card. Upon

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receiving the notifications, he would then call her immediately to check with the expenditure.

Secondly, video calls, similar to voice calls, also allowed for synchronous dyadic surveillance. In contrast to their predecessor, however, video calls were usually “*limited to family members*”. This was because video calls made surveillance visually instantaneous, earning its title as “the most intimate and private method of communication” (Peng, 2016, p. 2397). They allowed for the observation of not only migrant women themselves, but also provided contextual information of women’s physical surroundings. One woman spoke of how her husband sometimes called her for a video chat, through which he could see “*what clothes I wear, becoming fat or slim, and the environment (where I am staying)*”.

Thirdly, group chatting acted as a separate function from private voice and video calls, extending surveillance to public spaces where multiple family members were engaged. Many women had WeChat⁴ groups with their joint families. One woman even joined a village-centric group chat, which, according to her, included “*all of her villagers who knew how to use WeChat*”. Their off-line kinship networks in rural communities of arranged gender power relationships were extended to these groups. Consequently, the patriarchal system of rural families was duplicated. Senior family members of higher patriarchal status were entitled to bring up private issues of migrant women during group chatting as a means of exhibiting care and instruction for the younger generations. Contradicting its original intention, this exposed the

⁴ WeChat is the most popular Chinese multi-purpose messaging, social media and mobile payment app.

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personal lives of these women to collective attention and surveillance from their entire families. Here, a woman recalled her experiences about being urged into marriage in her family group chat.

“My aunt yelled (in the group): ‘why Xin (her anonym) still did not have a partner at such an age? do you need me to introduce one to you?’”

Despite her embarrassment, being a docile daughter who was expected to obey words from the senior, she had to stay silent.

However, interestingly, different from synchronous communication via voice and video calls, group chat was asynchronous. This asynchronous characteristic of group chat, combined with its affordance of multi-sided interactions, enabled other family members to join the conversation. In the aforementioned case, group chat allowed another senior male family member, the woman’s uncle, to step out to mediate. He told the aunt who urged the woman into marriage that, *“no need your worries nah, how do you know Xin was single now neh”*, thereby alleviating the embarrassment of the woman. Since many parties could join group chats whenever they wanted, the social norms that disciplined their interactions tended to be more chaotic (Ling & Lai, 2016). To clarify, in real-time voice and video calls that occurred between a woman and one of her family members of higher patriarchal status, the clear hierarchical gender power relationship between them dominated their mobile communication. In comparison, mobile groups allowed the involvement of multiple family relationships in the negotiation of gender power dynamics, such as the aforementioned *“aunt”* and *“uncle”*. *“Aunt”* deployed her seniority to bring up surveillance upon the woman’s private life in the group, while *“uncle”* responded with his male authority to confront *“aunt”*, terminating the

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surveillance while alleviating the embarrassing situation. Under these circumstances, surveillance was less strict compared to voice and video calls.

Familial surveillance, no matter in which manner, was encountered with opposing nascent desires of women for autonomy and freedom. Their desires stemmed out of their shifted socio-economic status. Echoing duality of structure, socio-economic structure, while giving rise to social exclusions against migrant women, also provided them with social resources to seek personal changes. Especially, the transformation from rural women to equally significant breadwinners as their male family members, as well as embrace of different lifestyles in urban areas, encouraged them to reflect upon traditional gender norms. This led to migrant women's declaration that "*we are no longer that traditional and conservative*". Single women learned to use "*out*", a modern English word to describe traditional marriage culture. They complained that spouses introduced by families were usually too "*machismo*" (*Dananzi Zhuyi* 大男子主义), meaning that "*everything is up to him, all decided by him*". Instead, they started to look up to modern expectations of husbands and marital relationships, articulating that they were looking for someone who could be considerate about their needs. As for married women, they concurrently took actions to shape and alter perceptions about gendered labor division in families, claiming that, "*women should have their authority (in a marriage)*", and "*couples should share housework*".

Women's mobile phone use strengthened their agency to enact strategies to avoid surveillance. They developed a strategy known as "*blocking*", which excluded their families from certain mobile communicative spaces. Specifically, various mobile media affordances on the smartphone

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enabled them to divide different social interactions into separated mobile spaces. They continued to reserve intimate mobile communicative spaces, such as voice and video calls, for family members, but restricted other mobile spaces, such as social media platforms, merely to peers as their “hidden spaces of resistance” (Wang, 2007, p. 706). It was common to see women excluding their family members’ access to their Moments or Friends’ Circle (*Pengyouquan* 朋友圈), the social media platform embedded in WeChat. In these spaces, they explored modern articulations of being women, which were quite distinguished from their traditional moral codes. These articulations usually embodied modern feminist reflections upon love and marriage, promoting equal gender status and communication between women and men. For instance, one woman talked about articles from her subscribed Public Account (*Gongzhong Zhanghao* 公众账号) in Moments, titled, “*If you (a husband) drive your wife crazy, it is your failure*”, and “*Each couple is not afraid of fighting, but afraid of not talking to each other*”.

However, it is worth noting a back-and-forth contest between surveillance and avoidance. From the side of family members, they coped with migrant women’s avoidance via strengthened surveillance. Some family members transcended mobile spaces that were specially reserved to them to extend surveillance to women’s hidden mobile spaces. Women stated that their mobile phone was frequently “*checked*” by family members who migrated with them, a documented surveillance behavior by prior research (Amraham, 2009). Single women talked about how senior family members used this way to keep an eye upon their potential involvement in underground dating with men “*who came from different hometowns*” and “*could not provide a good life*”. Similarly,

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married women reported phone checks by their husbands, claiming that “(my) *phone was transparent (to him)*”.

Faced with surveillance to invade hidden mobile spaces, women responded by “*deleting*” concealed mobile communicative records in time. One example came from a single woman who tried to avoid surveillance from her elder sister upon her illicit intimate relationship. Her sister worked in a city nearby and sometimes dropped by to visit. During visits, her sister occasionally checked her phone. Therefore, before meeting her sister, she promptly deleted all communicative records with a male migrant worker whom she was dating secretly.

“He (my boyfriend) messaged me (on phone), I also replied something. (I) delete everything, then my sister came back to check (my phone, and she won’t find anything).”

4.1.1.2 Intervention vs. Negotiation via accommodation

Women’s physical separation from rural families, their economic independence, and exposure to different lifestyles sometimes led to an increased fear of their family members to “*lose control*” over them. In these cases, surveillance was not enough. Family members went beyond close observation to direct intervention, with the purpose of placing women under absolute control and eliminating their agency to diverge from tradition.

The mobile phone, again, became the tool to exercise the intervention. Women reported that their family members intervened with their usage of the phone, forbidding their access to some mobile media affordances while allowing others. For instance, married women stated that their husbands banned

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them from using QQ⁵, WeChat and similar types of social apps. This ban stemmed out of a widespread rumor about using social apps could lead to the infidelity of wives. As described by a woman,

“Our village has the case that wife running away with man (met) on WeChat... she chatted with a man online, then the man told her to run away, then she carried kid to run away.”

This rumor alerted husbands that social apps might provide wives with chances to socialize with male strangers online. These strangers might “seduce” their wives to let them abandon traditional moral codes for personal romantic desires. Afraid of “losing control” over wives, husbands in return intervened by forbidding their access to these apps. Wives were warned that “online stuff is all lie” and “nothing is real online”.

When women were in the face of intervention, mobile phone use allowed their agency to negotiate via accommodation. To elaborate, above the surface, women performed their superficial accommodation with intervention from family members. They even took the initiative to invite family members to be the guardians of their mobile spaces with the rights to decide whom they could contact. However, the real purpose of women was to obtain a moral shelter to veil their pursuit of personal interests and desires. One commonly observed phenomenon was that single women asked their interested male admirers to obtain their phone numbers from their senior family members working in the same place. As one woman stated,

“He (a male worker) wanted to date me, and I told him that, you asked my uncle (who worked in the same factory) for my phone

⁵ Tencent QQ, also known as QQ, is an instant messaging software service popular in China.

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*number, and then my uncle asked me you two knew each other?
And then he said, then you tried to date.”*

Such behaviors allowed these women to present their traditional conservative gender images and chastity to senior family members. More significantly, once family members allowed their contacts to men, this permission could be their excuse to legitimize their engagement in intimate interactions with these men on the phone. Women would say they were granted with the approval to date their interested men. As a result, superficial accommodation to traditional gender norms de facto justified their pursuit of modern free love.

If women did not manifest the accommodation, a more severe punishment would wait for them. Especially, some women just hid their unconventional gender practices. Once their secrets were exposed, their family members would go beyond intervention with how they used the mobile phone to confiscate their mobile device. An example of this is shown in an anecdote of a woman talking about her father took away her phone after knowing her hidden relationship with a male migrant worker.

“My dad did not allow me to work outside again (forcing me to go back home) and took away my phone. He locked my phone and claimed clearly (that I could not use the phone). I was always afraid of my dad. My dad put my phone away, shut it down, and then even pulled out the telephone line.”

This intervention aimed at the complete deprivation of women's agency to own any personal spaces to manage personal choices, therefore further subjugating them to traditional gender roles and power relationships.

This escalated intervention eventually drove women to the strategy of negotiation via accommodation. In the above story, the woman's boyfriend and his mother eventually decided to follow the conventional ritual of “*proposing a*

marriage” (*Tiqing* 提亲). They visited her family to obtain approval from her father over the marriage, again, earning a traditional cover upon free love.

In conclusion, throughout the chapter 4.1.1, mobile phone use of Chinese female migrant workers reinforced, on the one hand, traditional patriarchal orders above the surface, and on the other hand, women’s agency for the pursuit of modern desires, often in a subtle and hidden way. More precisely, surveillance with the aid of mobile phone use placed gendered behaviors of women under the strict monitoring from senior family members, and intervention with their mobile phone use stepped further to enhance the prevention of their possible divergence from the traditional definition of being women. However, if one takes a more in-depth look beneath the surface, women’s hidden experiences of modernity could be noticed. Under mobile phone use, both avoidance and accommodation strategies enabled them to gain themselves some autonomy and freedom to touch upon gendered views that embodied modern feminist thinking, and even transformed these views into unconventional gender practices. As a result, while the patriarchal hierarchy retained its rules and orders in shape apparently, its real social impacts to discursively and practically discipline gender roles of migrant women might fade away in the long run.

4.1.2 Experiment with modernity in urban areas

Gender struggles of Chinese female migrant workers were not limited to negotiation with rural tradition, but also involved experiment with modernity in urban areas. Mobile phone use was found to constrain and enhance their agency under this experiment. While mobile phone use introduced unwanted intrusion from men into private mobile spaces of women, it facilitated women’s

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enactment of strategic defense to filter men's entry. After women allowing selected men into private mobile spaces, mobile phone use, on the one hand, enabled men multiple ways to obtain more personal information about women, which might reinforce women's vulnerability to sexual provocation and harassment. On the other hand, mobile phone use empowered women with a variety of methods for self-protection from dangerous personal information exposure.

4.1.2.1 Intrusion vs. Defense

For Chinese female migrant workers, experiment with modernity in urban areas could hardly be equivalent to the embrace of gender equality (Hoy, 2007). As noted before, they migrated to urban areas with social expectations as docile and compliant "*Dagongmei*" (打工妹) (Pun, 1999, p.1) - "*young sister working for the boss*". Particularly, young migrant women were easily sexually objectified in host societies. Furthermore, their restricted gender status was amplified by socio-economic marginalization. Being "floating populations" (*Liudongrenkou* 流动人口) (Li, 2006, p. 194), they were excluded from the reach of social security of host societies. Such interlocking social constraints contributed to their vulnerability to sexual provocation and harassment (Jacka, 2005). Women complained that some men "*looked for you to do that thing (casual sex)*", and "*tried to cheat your sex and money.*"

Unfortunately, mobile phone use allowed men to enforce their intrusion into women's private mobile spaces to increase their vulnerability to harassment. Especially, the traditional telecommunication services, including phone calls and short message service, provided men with one-way channels to contact women without the need to obtain their permission in the first place.

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What men needed was the phone number of women. Prior research focused on how this one-way communicative characteristic of telecommunication service allowed mobile spams to invade the privacy of mobile phone users (Srivastava, 2005). However, in the context of this thesis, this characteristic facilitated the exhibition of authority by men and restricted women's agency for resistance.

To take advantage of this convenience, men, male migrant workers particularly, thus tried every possible method to obtain women's phone numbers. Here, the author noticed an incident of a woman in which a male colleague asked her for the phone number of her friend as part of a larger scheme to get her number. Once she provided him with her friend's number, the man went on to ask this friend for her number instead. After "*going through such a big circle*", this man eventually messaged her, successfully transforming public workplace interactions with her to private mobile conversations.

Exhibition the control over women's phone numbers even became a means of men to show off their power to access women whenever they wished. One woman spoke distastefully about her number written on the factory walls by a male worker. This woman had her number sought after by this man, but she turned him down. Her rejection irritated him, and he subsequently took his revenge by "*writing (her) phone number on the wall*", warning the woman that,

"You (the woman) did not allow others your mobile phone number, right? I have her mobile phone number, you (anyone) can take it."

Due to the one-way communicative characteristic of telecommunication service, having the phone numbers of women could be mostly equated to owning the entry to their private mobile spaces. Therefore, the behavior of men to expose numbers of women to the public was to demonstrate their control

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over the channels to women's very personal spaces. That is why, in the above example, the man was able to deploy the behavior of exposing a woman's phone number as a method to humiliate her and counterattack her resistance against his authority.

Rather than yielding to silent suffering, women responded with defense. Firstly, the migratory experiences to "see the world" (Wallis, 2011, p. 475) made them no longer shy and obedient rural women. Additionally, their independent economic sources strengthened their self-independence and reduced their reliance upon men. As they said, they felt they gained "*status*" (*Diwei* 地位) in front of men. Therefore, they underscored their decision-making power over men's entry into their private mobile spaces while excluding unwanted intrusion. Although women were not able to prevent first-time disturbances due to the aforementioned characteristic of traditional telecommunication services, the "*blocking*" affordance allowed their agency to defend themselves from further intrusion. They firstly "*watched and saw what he talked about*", then subsequently "*pulled him into the blacklist*" once they found the man's words "*irritating*".

However, it is worth noting that, location-based social mobile apps exposed women to the other type of intrusion from male strangers online. Such intrusion was aided by global positioning systems (GPS), which allow strangers who are geographically nearby a chance to meet online. Scholarly attention has been widely drawn to how it plays a part in changing the social lives of marginalized groups of people. For instance, Blackwell, Birnholtz, and Abbott (2015) describe the crucial role of Grindr, a location-aware mobile dating app, in the daily sexual encounters of the gay community. The author enriches the

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current discussion by discovering that this affordance was quite popular among Chinese female migrant workers, especially the single ones, for their engagement in online intimate experiences. However, despite its benefits, such affordance also had the potential to expose women to unwanted intrusion from unknown men online. Women reported that they occasionally received “*Hi*” (*Dazhaohu* 打招呼) from men on People Nearby (*Fujinderen* 附近的人) of WeChat, or MoMo (陌陌) – a mobile app specially designed for interactions between geographically close strangers.

Conversely, location-based apps also allowed the affordance for women to defend themselves from unwanted male intrusion. On these apps, despite being able to identify nearby women via GPS, men could not enforce their entry into women’s private mobile spaces, like what they could via traditional telecommunication channels. Instead, men had to first send “Friend Invitations” (*Haoyoushenqing* 好友申请) to women and wait for their approval before being able to initiate private interactions. Under these circumstances, the establishment of social connections with women was no longer only dependent upon men. Now, women also had the power to decide whom they would like to further intimate conversations with, and at the same time, block out those whom they did not.

Furthermore, these apps also enhanced the agency of women to obtain personal information of male strangers online in order to make a more informed decision before allowing men’s entry into their private mobile spaces. Women were able to access profile pictures of men, their “signature” (*Gexingqianming* 个性签名), and sometimes, a few recent posts. These pieces of information, albeit limited, enabled women to negotiate agency to filter out unwanted

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disturbances and solely admit their interested ones. An example of this was exhibited in a woman's experience of checking profile pictures of men on MoMo. Here, she claimed, when she saw, *"there is factory logo (on his clothes)"* in his profile picture, she asked him, *"where are you working ah?"*. After confirming with this man that he also worked in this factory, she started more personal conversations with him. Another woman resonated, explaining her ways of *"selecting"* male strangers online for closer interactions.

"I do not add people randomly. Instead, I look at his profile and Moments, the (available) content that he posts. If his posts are inappropriate (乱七八糟), I would not add him. Then, also signature, if he wrote something, not make me feel disgusting (then I will add him)."

4.1.2.2 Personal information exposure vs. Self-protection

After allowing selected men into private mobile spaces, personal information exposure became the major concern of female migrant workers when engaging in more intimate interactions, particularly with male strangers online. As noted above, the restricted gender status of migrant women, in conjunction with their absent social security, tended to contribute to their vulnerability to potential sexual provocation and harassment. They were additionally made more vulnerable to male strangers online who approached them anonymously. As Menesini, Calussi, and Nocentini (2012) denote, anonymous online environments have the potential to increase one's exposure to cyberbullying and sexual assault. Originally, women enjoyed talking to unknown men as *"he does not know me and my life, so he will not tell others about what I told him"*. However, it was not uncommon for women to express worries about *"disclosure of privacy"* to men who *"might not be trustworthy"*.

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Women's worries were strengthened, given the multiple media affordances on social mobile apps granting opportunities for male strangers online to learn more about them privately. Firstly, under dyadic mobile communication, men could gradually progress from asynchronous communication to synchronous communication to obtain more social cues of women. As women stated, men would normally "*start with (text-based) messages*", and some men would ask them to "*send photos*" to get more visual information about their appearances. Later, men would go on to invite them for real-time voice calls to "*have a more real feeling*" of them, and even upgrade the requests for voice calls to visually instantaneous video calls. For instance, one woman said, "*he (one online stranger) is a Southerner, and he's heard that North-eastern ladies (where I came from) are fierce, and he wanted to see it by himself*".

Additionally, social media platforms embedded in these social mobile apps, such as Moments on WeChat, provided another channel for men to obtain women's personal information by simply checking their posts. Even though to which degree men could view the posts depended upon women's "Privacy Settings" (*Yinsishezhi* 隐私设置), men still tried to know more about women via their accessible information from these social media platforms.

However, on another note, diversified mobile media affordances also enhanced the agency of migrant women to negotiate their strategic methods for self-protection while enjoying intimate interactions with male strangers online. Firstly, asynchronous communicative characteristic allowed women to reply to men with revised personal information. The lapse in time between messaging in asynchronous mobile communication provided women with the ability to

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modify their responses. As noted above, men sometimes wanted women to “*send photos to see at how I(he) looked like*”. Women would then be able to respond with “*photos after Photoshop*”, which, in their words, presented “*a beautified image*”, without so much “*reflect(ing) the real look*”.

Secondly, synchronous communicative channels without visual exposure, such as voice calls, enabled women to learn more about men without exposing their physical appearances. For example, women would only initiate voice calls with men once their relationships stepped into a more intimate stage. This is because voice calls, firstly, disclosed the voice and tone of men, making them feel like they were “*facing the person*”. Moreover, the synchronous interactions via voice call that required immediate responses also enabled them to gather more real-time information about men that was not readily available using asynchronous messages. As they said, “*the feeling of dialing could be quite different (compared to messages)*”, as “*texts (via messaging) could be quite interesting, but (we) may not have much to say on voice call*”. In so doing, women were able to protect themselves by achieving a better judgment about the trustworthiness of men. Based on this judgment, they could decide to which degree they would expose personal information.

Additionally, affordances that gave women knowledge about any overlapping social relationships with men provided them with another means of self-protection. After acquiring some basic information from men, women had the option to search for the existence of any common friends to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the men. This is reflected in a particular woman’s case who looked for mutual friends from the same hometown with a male stranger she met on QQ. She said, after knowing where the man came

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from, she immediately turned to “*ask friends online (from his hometown) whether know him or not, like this, asking which type of person he was ah, like this*”. In so doing, she managed to obtain personal information of the man behind his back. According to her, she felt she “*knew more about him*”, compared to the knowledge of the man about her. Therefore, women like her were able to gain better judgment regarding whether to trust men on the other side of the phone.

Chapter 4.1.2 demonstrates that mobile phone use of Chinese female migrant workers exposed them further to potential sexual provocation and harassment from men in host societies, and simultaneously, allowed their emphasis upon their own decision-making power in respect to whether and how to engage themselves in modern intimate interactions with men. To be more specific, mobile phone use introduced male-dominant intrusion to women’s private mobile spaces, and furthermore, potentially facilitated development of such intrusion into threats to the personal security of women. Although defense from women with the aid of mobile phone use was not able to eliminate their vulnerability to sexual assault from men, they gradually embraced their personal choices over, firstly selection of men to enter their private mobile spaces, and secondly how to interact with selected men. In so doing, women were increasingly attaching significance to their personal feelings and preferences in their experiment with modernity in host societies, constantly transcending traditional expectations of women’s docility and compliance in front of men.

4.2 Mobile phone use in the professional sphere

In the professional sphere, mobile phone use of Chinese female migrant workers simultaneously constrained and enhanced their agency in negotiation with patriarchal management, and construction of their resistance against patriarchal oppression from male peers.

4.2.1 Negotiation with patriarchal management

Under negotiation with patriarchal management, mobile phone use both constrained and enhanced the agency of Chinese female migrant workers in two types of gender struggles. Firstly, while mobile phone use reinforced subservience of women to the capitalist mode of production, it also allowed them opportunities to seek equality when communicating with those of management positions. Secondly, mobile phone use enhanced the prevailing gender stereotype in the workplace that devalued women's leadership capability, and at the same time, aided women's professional growth, particularly those gaining leadership positions of workgroups to establish their authority.

4.2.1.1 Subservience vs. Equality

In the workplace, Chinese female migrant workers were restricted to patriarchal management (Pun, 2005; Yan, 2008). They joined the urban labor market as "*Dagongmei*" (*Young sister working for the boss* 打工妹) (Pun, 1999, p. 1). The label itself embodied interlocking social systems of oppression. Firstly, "*Dagong*" denoted their limited socio-economic status as "*working for the boss*". To specify, as cheap migrant labor force, they were easily entrapped to the bottom of their workplaces, staying vulnerable to exploitation under the capitalist mode of production (Li, 2006). Furthermore, they were also "*Mei*",

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which referred to “*young sister*”, and their gender image was thus expected to be docile and compliant. As a result, the capitalist exploitation was likely to be intertwined with their restricted gender status, exposing them to patriarchal surveillance and control from management in the workplace (Pun, 2005).

Migrant women reported that supervisors of shop floors, mainly males, usually “*watched out every action*” of them, and complained that, “*it is really difficult for me to be observed all the time when I am working*”. One male supervisor even interrupted the interview with a woman during her break, scolding the author that the woman had to go back to work.

Mobile phone use reinforced subservience of migrant women to patriarchal management. The mobile phone was deployed to duplicate the hierarchal system of the factory online, from general managers to ordinary workers. WeChat groups of various ranks were required to be established to extend management at every level. At the top, there were groups between managers and shop-floor supervisors. Of a lower rank, with a shop floor as a unit, groups were set up between shop-floor supervisors and group leaders under their leadership. And at the bottom, every workgroups had their individual WeChat groups to connect group leaders and ordinary workers. Please refer to the graph below to capture an overview of the operation of WeChat groups within this factory.

Structure of WeChat workgroups of the factory

Firstly, these WeChat groups facilitated top-down vertical flows of work orders and notifications. Usually, work-related information would be released from managers to shop-floor supervisors, and then travel from supervisors to their instructed group leaders, and eventually reach ordinary workers from group leaders. As these groups created public spaces where multiple parties were engaged, the information could be spread to all group members at the same time. Therefore, work efficiency was largely improved. As one group leader said, before the usage of WeChat groups, information was delivered one-to-one via messaging and voice call. She said,

“When leaders have something to find you, all group members can check the information in group, almost everyone can see, then only need (leaders) to send notification.”

The efficient vertical information delivery system via group chat contributed to the reinforcement of patriarchal management. It benefited people of the management level with more convenient ways to impose rules and regulations upon female migrant workers at the bottom of this system. Ordinary female workers merely performed as information receivers. They had to “check

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phone frequently in case of missing out any information” about their work requirements. Whenever information reached them, they were asked to reply immediately that they had been notified.

Secondly, WeChat groups also aided “*report of work status*” (*Huibaogongzuo* 汇报工作) from bottom to top. Women were required to update their work progress one-by-one to leaders in WeChat workgroups. According to them, the work report was their “*most anxious part*”. Management would “*criticize*” them directly in groups once their work did not reach the standard. One woman described,

“Sometimes, leader scolded us...pointing out our names...Always, not just when I made mistake he criticized me, everyone the same.”

Such behaviors of scolding women within WeChat groups, in fact, publicized their mistakes to all group members, and thereby embarrassing them in front of their peers. As noted before, different from dyadic mobile communicative channels that created relatively private spaces, group chat opened up public spaces where multiple parties were engaged at the same time (Ling & Lai, 2016). In these public spaces, any information exposure about a single person would capture collective attention from the rest of group members. Therefore, “*report work status*” in WeChat groups usually fostered “*anxious atmosphere*”, warning women that they would be publicly embarrassed if they failed to strictly follow rules and regulations in the workplace. One woman said,

“When he (leader) scolded you here, other people can see, for what he scolded you, what mistake you have committed, others can learn a lesson. Not to make the same mistake.”

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It is important to note that, alternative mobile communication channels providing dyadic and synchronous affordances were deployed to supplement management through group chats. Compared to group chatting, these affordances enabled management to reach any subordinate at any time and in any place. For instance, in WeChat workgroups where interactions were asynchronous, women sometimes might delay their response to notifications when they were not able to check phones in time. Under this circumstance, voice calls from their superior would reach them immediately to scold their negligence while addressing orders and notifications again to them directly.

In addition, dyadic voice calls allowed those of management positions relatively private spaces to talk to women. In these private spaces, it was more convenient for them to “rebuke” (*Xun 训*) women as much as they liked. In public spaces of WeChat groups, if they still had to watch out their words to maintain their professional image in front of group members, under dyadic voice calls, they no longer needed to mind their altitude. They could spill out their anger to belittle women for the purpose of, in their words, helping women “correct their mistakes”. As one male shop-floor supervisor said,

“You did not see (in phone calls), I scolded them to death, (female workers) all cried secretly, doing work you did not pay all efforts, then going back home to take care of your children bah.”

In general, reinforced management under mobile phone use resulted in the more restricted personal agency of migrant women at work. Women were observed to compliantly accommodate themselves with enacted standards by management. Under these accommodation processes, bodies of women were mechanized (Pun, 2005). In production shop floors, under monitoring from supervisors who stood aside, body movements of women were integrated into

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assembly lines, resonating with rhythms of production. In shop floors without assembly lines, such as those for label attachment, women regulated themselves to mechanize their gestures. They were engaged in routinized actions, from checking each fruit can, to attach the label, to put it back to box, and eventually to pack the box, one after another in an orderly way.

However, the capitalist mode of production also extended migrant women to embrace nascent aspirations for equality. As noted, before migration, women had already participated in the economic activities of their rural households, such as agricultural practices and side-line production (Dong, MacPhail, Bowles, & Ho, 2004). However, their economic contribution was usually unrecognized. In addition, their professional capability was still regarded as less than their male cohorts. As one popular saying in villages echoed, “*men are more able*” (*Nande Gengyou Benshi 男的更有本事*) (Judd, 1990, p. 40). Migration allowed them the chance to step out of the domestic sphere to enter urban workplaces under modern enterprise systems. In these workplaces, professional productivity, rather than domestic gender relations, was counted as the most significant criteria to measure their work (Jacka, 2005). Consequently, they were involved in the socio-economic transformation from unpaid housewives to factory workers whose earning and career development relied upon their professional performance. This transformation, although not guaranteeing their upward social mobility in urban areas to completely shift their class status (Wallis, 2011), offered them social resources to re-construct the understanding of their own professional worth. One woman laughed at her husband who thought she was not able to tolerate heavy workload in this factory, saying, “*now see, he is also thinking, yeah, my wife is*

quite capable.” The sense of achievement in workplaces encouraged their aspirations for equal work relationships in the professional sphere. Many of them used the word – “*not comfortable*” (*Budeijin* 不得劲) to describe their feeling with respect to patriarchal management in the factory.

Mobile phone use enabled women’s agency to seek temporary equality when communicating with those of management positions. The relatively equal communication usually took place in mobile spaces where they were connected with management in a non-professional manner. For instance, in the factory, some women and their leaders had added each other on WeChat as “Friends” (*Haoyou* 好友). The original purpose of such behaviors was for more convenient work information delivery and work status updates. However, after becoming “Friends”, some women were allowed with access to Moments of leaders, as noted before, the social media platform embedded in WeChat. Unlike WeChat workgroups, this platform was not dominated by rules and regulations of the factory. In this platform, interactions between women and leaders were no longer work-goal-oriented. Subsequently, their hierarchal differences were more likely to be contextually replaced by relatively equal non-professional relationships. Women, consequently, took advantage of these spaces to talk to leaders with an equal altitude that they would not dare to do in workgroups. One woman gave an example of how she made fun of her male shop-floor supervisor under his post of Moments. She said, the supervisor posted a photo of him getting an injection in hospital. She and some other workers “like(d)” (*Zan* 赞) this photo as a means to subtly express their happiness after knowing this supervisor got sick. This performed as their revenge for this supervisor’s harsh management in daily work. This woman

laughed, saying the supervisor replied later, “(how come) you guys liked (my getting sick)”.

4.2.1.1 Gender stereotype vs. Professional growth

Besides patriarchal management, intersected socio-structural constraints faced by migrant women were also exhibited as gender stereotype that devalued their potentials for professional advancement. As noted, social structures of gender and socio-economic usually worked together, contributing to their socially expected docile and compliant gender image as “*Dagongmei*”. Viewing them as “*Dagongmei*”, people of management level were more likely to treat them as cheap labor force, largely ignoring their competence for leadership positions. Interview with one male shop-floor supervisor reflected this phenomenon.

“Frankly speaking, this (leading) is not women’s work, women also cannot do, supervisors are like commander-in-chief, like leading army for a battle, women cannot do, how can women be leaders, (previously) have, but very less, same thing (to explain why women are not capable of taking leadership positions here), same thing.”

Like this male supervisor, management widely held the ideology that “*women are worse than men in leadership*”.

Even though some female migrant workers were appointed as group leaders, their agency of management was still largely restricted. Supervisors of shop floors always tried to skip them to take control of ordinary workers directly, and the mobile phone became the tool for these supervisors to reach this goal. The previous chapter demonstrated the vertical management via WeChat workgroups to duplicate the hierarchal structure of the factory. As mentioned, in these groups, shop-floor supervisors took charge of group leaders, and subsequently, group leaders were responsible for ordinary workers

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of their groups. However, supervisors sometimes preferred to manage ordinary workers on the phone by themselves while ignoring the existence of group leaders, particularly when group leaders were women. One supervisor talked about his plan of placing all workers in his shop floor directly under his control, without allowing any space to female group leaders under him to exhibit their agency of management. He said, he would soon “*establish one (WeChat group) for old workers, and one for new workers.*” Both groups were under his direct monitoring. He intended to get opinions about new workers from old ones, and vice versa. When he was talking about his plan of using WeChat to improve the management, a female group leader was standing beside him, staying quietly without providing her perspective.

However, the prevalent gender stereotype that depreciated the agency of migrant women in the workplace was conflicted with the fact of their professional growth. The gender-segregated urban job market provided them with gendered advantages at work. Prior studies have indicated that job opportunities for rural-urban female migrant usually congregate in service and manufacturing industries, mirroring socially expected gendered skills of women (Fan, 2003; Yan, 2008). While these studies critique that this gendered labor division is likely to expose migrant women to patriarchal oppression, this thesis provides a different observation. Engagement of migrant women in jobs that are socially considered more suitable for them, in fact, can grant them social resources to gain professional advantages. For instance, in this factory, women were viewed as more capable of canned fruit processing production that demanded patience, responsibility, and delicate manual work. Although supervisors called jobs here “*womanishly fussy*” (*Moji 磨叽*), which carried an

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air of sexism, they all agreed that “*women are more able to cope with work here*”. It is within this context, this factory allowed leadership to instruct small workgroups for women with distinguished professional skills and conscientiousness. With newly gained leadership, migrant women developed self-confidence regarding their professional achievement, which was contrasted with their encountered gender stereotype. One woman talked about her personal growth in the years of being a group leader.

“Anyways, I feel it is quite difficult to become group leaders, because I am a migrant, not having any friends or family relatives here. When I came to work here, my friend (who introduced me to work here) left already, only myself here, working till now, thinking (I am) pretty good, at least, upper (management level) knew you, and down (ordinary workers) recognized you (your capability of leading a group), so anyways, I feel I am pretty good bah.”

Mobile phone use became a means for migrant women with leadership to establish their professional authority within their groups. Firstly, mobile phone use facilitated the incorporation of female group leaders into the management level. Their responsibility of managing WeChat groups of ordinary workers made them a crucial part to ensure the efficient function of the vertical patriarchal management in the factory, like supervisors and managers above them. In WeChat groups under their guidance, above all, they needed to ascertain all group members were in place. “*When new member joins, you need to pull him/her in*” and “*when a member leaves, you need to pull him/her out*”. Furthermore, they took charge of work-related information delivery from a higher level to workers under them, such as “*new work requirements*”, “*wage clarification of last month*”, “*temporarily altered workplace for the next day*”.

Meanwhile, group members were required to report work to them in WeChat groups. For workers whose professional performance failed to live up

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with rules and regulations, female group leaders responded with their strategic punishment. They copied the management manner of their supervisors, warning these workers in public spaces of WeChat groups. Workers had to upload “*self-criticism letter*” (*Jiantaoshu* 检讨书) to publicly apologize for their mistakes to all group members. In so doing, female group leaders expected that workers would pay more attention to rules and regulations in the factory to avoid embarrassing themselves next time. Under the processes of managing their WeChat groups, they were gradually transforming themselves into part of the management layer, establishing the hierarchical difference between them and subordinates.

Secondly, mobile phone use allowed the agency of female group leaders to shift gender discourses of their groups. Leadership over groups equipped them with the power to re-construct gender power relationships between female and male subordinates. Their widely observed strategy to achieve this purpose was to give their WeChat groups a name that embodied modern feminist thinking. For instance, one female group leader named her group as “*Our world is under our control*” (*Wode Shijie Wozuo zhu* 我的世界我做主), stating that, the name “*showed the spirit of being a big woman*”. When asked about male workers in this group, this woman laughed,

“Men (in our group) have to show their obedience unconditionally... You see, like our team, we have ten members. But only two are women, the rest are men. But, the eight men don’t have any status in our group (laughing)... Because I (as the team leader) am a woman.”

Another female group leader resonated with naming her WeChat group as “*Women’s group*” (*Niangmenqun* 娘们群). According to her, most workers in this group were women, and for the only man in this group, “*he has got used*

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to this (women's world).” In so doing, these women were gradually changing the gender culture within their groups, differentiating it from the prevalent gender stereotype in the factory that devaluated the worth of women. As can be seen, in their groups, women occupied advantageous positions, and contrastingly, male authority was reduced.

Chapter 4.2.1 illustrates the role of mobile phone use enhanced both the patriarchal management, and its opposing side – nascent aspirations of migrant women for equality and professional development. Looking at the factory at large, one would notice the aid provided by mobile phone use to uphold the function of the hierarchal management system, which constantly regulated women to the capitalist mode of production while restricting their personal autonomy and freedom. In addition, mobile phone use also produced constraining gender effects upon women's professional advancement, squeezing their space to exhibit leadership capability. However, beneath the surface, one can notice women's bold attempts to establish equal mobile communication with those of management level, albeit only when they connected in non-professional ways. Moreover, mobile phone use allowed female group leaders to transform their obtained professional recognition to the establishment of their authority and even shifting gender discourses of their groups to highlight women's power.

4.2.2 Resistance against patriarchal oppression from male peers

Besides patriarchal surveillance and control from the people of management positions, female migrant workers also faced horizontal patriarchal oppression from their male peers - male migrant workers with a similar socio-economic status. Mobile phone use both constrained and

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enhanced women's agency to resist this oppression. Firstly, within the factory, WeChat workgroups provided male migrant workers with public spaces to exhibit their authority in front of women, and in the meanwhile, enabled women to collaborate with one another to show their collective confrontation. Secondly, beyond the factory, mobile phone use, on the one hand, played a part in facilitating male migrant workers taking charge of women's job information and thereby sustaining their decision-making power over women's migration. On the other hand, mobile phone use provided a means for women to establish and develop their own social networks to share job advice and social support, which subsequently improved their independence regarding migration.

4.2.2.1 Exhibition of male authority vs. Collective confrontation

For Chinese female migrant workers as "*Dagongmei*", the intersection of restricted gender status and socio-economic limitations, not only exposed them to patriarchal management, but also made them vulnerable to gendered oppression from male migrant workers in the same workplace. Prior research scarcely pays attention to hierarchical gender power relationships between female migrant workers and their male cohorts, although Pun (2005) mentions their unequal payment. However, this research observes that, the prevailing patriarchal culture in the factory shaped day-by-day social interactions between female and male migrant workers, placing women to a subservient status. As Confucian patriarchal ideology defines the professional sphere as male spaces (Ahrentzen, 1992; Wolf, 1974), men typically held the perception that they should play the dominant role in workplaces. In this factory, men felt that they were obliged to provide women with "*protection*" and "*help*", regardless of women's no worse or even more outstanding professional performance. This

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traditionally rooted ideology was further amplified by sex-segregated job positions. As noted, only men were allowed to undertake work that involved machine operation, and this type of work permitted them more physical mobility and autonomy. Examples can be seen from those male workers who drove forklift to shuttle between different shop floors. In comparison, work assigned to women mainly demanded their obedience and made them less autonomous. They had to either echo their actions with the rhythms of assembly lines or stand still in narrow corners to attach labels.

It is within this patriarchal context that WeChat workgroups became platforms for male migrant workers to exhibit their authority after daily work. Although the original purpose of establishing WeChat workgroups was to facilitate the delivery of work-related information, ordinary workers sometimes would blend words for amusement into their conversations with professional purposes. This phenomenon was very common when group leaders did not strictly regulate interactions amongst workers in their spare time. As one group leader stated, “*this is a platform for them to exchange (their feelings).*” Some male migrant workers, subsequently, took advantage of these mobile public spaces shared with their female colleagues to underscore their superior patriarchal positions. They were widely observed to raise themselves as “*big brother*” (*Dage* 大哥) or “*big father*” (*Daba* 大爸) when talking to women.

Opposite to men’s high evaluation of themselves, women did not feel inferior. Their similar payment and workload as compared to men gave rise to their confidence, “*what men can do, we also can do.*” They even laughed at complaints from men about the heavy workload, stating, “*we (women) have not felt tired, why you men complained ah.*” This confidence encouraged women’s

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desires of respect from men, instead of yielding themselves to traditionally expected womanly subservience.

Group chatting enabled the agency of women to collectively confront male authority. It is important to point out, given the vulnerability of women to sexual provocation and harassment, a single woman in her private mobile space, as noted in chapter 4.1.2, would possibly yield to silent suffering from aggressive languages from men. However, here, in public mobile spaces of WeChat workgroups, harassing words from men were presented to all of the female group members at the same time, and women could in return help one another to cope with male authority. With the co-presence of other women, women would be “*backed up*” (*Zhuangdan* 壮胆), as an old Chinese term goes, to become more audacious to confront men straightforwardly. Whenever encountering men’s attempts to leverage themselves as “*big brother*” (*Dage* 大哥) or “*big father*” (*Daba* 大爸), women replied with curse words such as “*You suck*” and “*Fuck you*” to show their contempt. They even pushed in, calling themselves “*the sister of your grandma*” (*Yilao* 姨姥), to seek a more authoritative position above men.

The contests between men and women in WeChat groups usually took place back and forth. Men, in the face with humiliation from women, revenged by proposing male dominant topics, trying to take charge of gender discourses within groups. For instance, one man initiated a conversation about drinking alcohol, which was traditionally framed as an inappropriate topic for women to engage in, particularly in public spaces (Ruan, 1991). He brought up recent drinking experiences, saying “*I, just drunk half a bottle of beer, so dizzy.*”

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However, the socio-economic equality between women and men blurred the gender boundary that traditionally divided them. In this case, women no longer viewed sensitive topics due to gender differences as reserved to men. Rather than avoiding these topics, women responded with the humiliation of men's ego. For instance, faced with the man's showing-off of his drinking experiences, one woman presented her indifference, and put forward her better capability of handling alcohols. She replied, "*I still could write after drinking two bottles of alcohols.*"

Rather than giving in, men got back to women with playing their trump card, belittling women via sexually flirtatious words. Their revenge was built upon traditional moral modes that addressed the significance of the virginity of women (Zhou, 1989). If women lost their virginity, they would carry social condemnation from their families and communities. However, this gender norm was hardly applied to men, and sexual behaviors of men were beyond surveillance and control. Men were entitled with the authority to joke about sex freely, and in comparison, women were socially restricted from touching this topic, particularly in public spaces. As a result, talking to women in a flirtatious manner allowed men a way to suppress women's agency of resistance. For instance, the man who was faced with the challenge from women in respect to his capability of drinking, fought back by saying, "*let's check in a hotel when we are drunk.*"

In return, women collaborated to take advantage of men sexually. Echoing what has been mentioned in the literature review, according to the Chinese tradition, "law does not punish group behaviors" (*Fabuzechong* 法不责众). If one woman talked to men in a flirtatious manner, she might put her

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reputation in danger. However, group chat allowed women public spaces to support one another, fostering their women-dominant sexual harassment of men. For instance, when invited by the man to have sex, the woman, rather than avoiding herself from the conversation, replied, “*we should go (to hotel) one day when we are sober.*” In so doing, firstly, she rejected to play the role of a victim who felt embarrassing about her virginity being publicly discussed by the man. Instead of shunning the sexually provocative words, she jokingly accepted the invitation to have sex. Furthermore, she even placed herself in a sexually advantageous position. She laughed at the conservative mind of the man, questioning him with outrageously sexual words, why not to have sex when both of them were sober. Interestingly, after her words, another woman backed her up, complementing, “*he needs to be encouraged by alcohol, otherwise, he would not dare.*” This woman reinforced humiliation of the man, exhibiting her contempt to his cowardice in a more direct way.

4.2.2.2 Male-dominant migration vs. Emergent female social networks

The patriarchal hierarchy between women and men in the professional sphere was also exhibited in the dominant role played by men to decide women’s migration. Although the globalized commodification of care work has created the unique phenomenon of female-led migration (Bettio, Simonazzi, & Villa, 2006; Parreñas, 2001), a huge number of less-skilled migrant women of developing countries still act as the companies to their male family members (Bielby & Bielby, 1992; Bonney & Love, 1991). Their migration is largely reliant upon decisions made by these men. The same phenomenon is applied to the context of Chinese internal migration. Firstly, traditional gender norms

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entitled men with the authority to be the head of their families, and at the same time, made women as followers. Additionally, the marginalized migratory status of women also restricted their autonomy to migrate on their own. Under migration, women were easily situated into insecure working environments to face brutal capitalist exploitation meshed with patriarchal oppression from both management and male workers. Women during interviews mentioned their prior experiences of “*not getting paid in time*”, as well as “*too harsh work*”. Sometimes, they even encountered “*nasty*” men in workplaces. These potential dangers threatened the security of women, and furthermore, strengthened the perception of male family members that women should migrate with them to work under their protection, or at least, take their advice to choose “*more suitable places*”. Therefore, men usually mastered the decision-making power over what women should go, with their preferences outweighing choices of women.

Men benefited from mobile phone use to take charge of women’s job information, thus upholding their dominant roles. Quite a few women reported that, it was typically their male family members who kept mobile contacts with job referees. These job referees updated men with recruitments of the female labor force on phones. Then men would filter job information for women, selecting the “*more reliable job*” for women, and what women needed to do was to “*follow*” the decision.

However, this traditionally defined male domination was contrary to the urban labor market that created more and more job opportunities particularly for women. It is important to note that, post-Mao China has been witnessing a shifting job market that increasingly favors female migrant labor force. This

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changed job market stems out of the industrial transformation in recent years, which encourages the prosperity of manufacturing and third industries (Yang, Liu, Li, & Li, 2018). These thriving industries subsequently create a huge number of job vacancies for rural-urban female migrant workers. In some areas that demand caring and delicate manufacturing work, women even appear to be more welcomed compared to their male cohorts. According to the latest statistic in 2017, young female migrant workers occupied almost half of all rural-urban population transfer (NBS, 2018). The shifting socio-economic status of women in the job market tends to allow them social resources to have a stronger agency to migrate on their own. In this factory, many women were observed to migrate in clusters instead of following their male family members. Women referred the author to their village fellows (*Laoxiang* 老乡), or in their words, their “*little sisters*” (*Xiaojiemei* 小姐妹), with whom they migrated together.

Mobile phone use facilitated the agency of migrant women to develop their own social networks for the sharing of job opportunities and social support. Especially, dyadic and synchronous mobile media affordance, such as voice calls, allowed women a convenient way to update job information in time. Firstly, one commonly observed phenomenon was that voice calls connected migrant women with their left-behind female peers in hometowns to encourage the migration of these women without any work experiences. Such examples could be seen from the narrative of one woman who called her female neighbor in villages to inform her about the feelings of working in the factory. This woman stated that she really enjoyed working here, so she intended to help her neighbor who never stepped out of the village explore the outside world. Her story represented many migrant women who used mobile phones to play the

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role of delivering messages in respect to life and work in urban areas to their un-migrated female village fellows. In so doing, they both provided job information and social support to those left-behind female cohorts to reduce their fears about working outside alone.

In addition, such social networks with the aid of mobile phone use were also established amongst migrant women for the exchange of job information. For instance, women kept contacts with their previous female colleagues to get job information from other places. They called to enquire, “*how much you get paid*”, “*whether the payment is on time*”, and so forth. For instance, women who temporarily left the factory usually maintained connections with those who still worked here to seek appropriate opportunities to return. One woman said she left the factory last winter as it was beyond her tolerance to hold cold fruit cans in such a frozen season. However, during her leave, she still intended to come back in warm seasons. Therefore, she called her old female colleagues at regular intervals to enquire employment in this factory. In her words, “*everything was under control*”, even though she was physically away. Such mobile social connectivity amongst women enabled them to master job information and do the comparison for a better choice with “*higher payment*” and “*better working condition*”.

The chapter 4.2.2 presented resistance from Chinese female migrant workers in a collective and relatively visible form. Firstly, while group chats exposed women to men’s exhibition of patriarchal authority, its multi-sided communicative characteristic allowed women to demonstrate collective confrontation. It is interesting to note that, many women claimed that they “*never imagined before*” that they would talk to men in such a sexually

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audacious way as what they did right now in groups. In their words, they were “*twisted*” (*Daihuaile* 带坏了) from the traditional gender norms. In WeChat groups, women were able to observe and learn from one another to re-negotiate the gender norms to interact with men, which led to the gradual diminishment of the traditional patriarchal orders between them and men. Such behaviors were no longer restricted to hidden pursuit of personal interests and desires but displayed obvious challenges to patriarchal oppression and further exerted impacts to alter women’s subservient status in their groups. Similarly, emergent female social networks with the aid of mobile phone use also made visible of the largely increased independence of women to migrate on their own and presented their reduced reliance upon men.

Chapter 5 Discussion

Built upon the findings, the chapter of discussion is divided into two dimensions. The first section proposes the new theoretical framework that transcends the gender (dis)empowerment dichotomy to unfold the double-faceted role of the mobile phone use, while the second elaborates the gender transformation mediated by mobile phone use occurring at the individual, interactional, and institutional level.

5.1 The double-faceted role of mobile phone use

Bridging the intersectionality perspective with the theory of structuration, this thesis challenges the prevailing gender (dis)empowerment dichotomy in the interpretation of mobile phone use. It unfolds a new theoretical lens to capture the contextually situated and dynamically negotiated role of mobile phone use in the situations of power imbalance. Especially, the gendered social meanings arising from mobile phone use are understood in the interactions between agency and intersected social structures. From this lens, this thesis uncovers the double-faceted role of mobile phone use that gives rise to the constraining and empowering processes at the same time. While mobile practices reinforce structural constraints via facilitating identification, surveillance, and intervention from those of higher patriarchal statuses, it simultaneously allows strategic responses from women that involve avoidance, accommodation, personal development, and collaboration.

5.1.1 Reinforced structural constraints

Mobile phone use enables the reinforcement of social structural constraints to suppress women's agency through three progressive steps – identification, surveillance, and intervention. The progressive nature of these steps arises

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conceptually from the increasing levels of intrusion and control, rather than as a sequential series. First, the channels required to identify women are enforced. Next comes surveillance, the close observation of women's daily gender practices. Finally, mobile-enabled interventions aim to place women under absolute control.

Firstly, identification via women's phone number was observed to lead to unwanted disturbance from male colleagues. However, the mobile phone number no longer acts as the sole channel to access women. Nowadays, the geographical information system embedded in women's smartphone provides an alternative, yet more intrusive, method of identifying them via their locations. Numerous studies have addressed the potential privacy risks brought about by the widespread diffusion of GPS (He, Wu, & Khosla, 2004; Puttaswamy & Zhao, 2010). Location-based social media apps were observed to expose women to countless male strangers online located nearby, who were thus able to initiate conversations with them due to the open nature of public mobile spaces. Such location-based identification has expanded the means of identifying women, facilitating unsolicited and unwelcome entry into their private spaces.

Secondly, surveillance allows for gender behaviors of women to be placed under constant monitoring. The thesis reveals that different mobile communicative characteristics help the shaping of diversified forms of surveillance. Firstly, surveillance, with the aid of synchronous mobile interactions, can track women over "the reconstruction of space and time" (Ling & Campbell, 2009). It not only surpasses geographical spans, but also positions women under real-time observation, allowing men or family members to

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perform instantaneous status checks by asking questions such as “*where are you?*”, or “*what are you doing?*”. Secondly, synchronous surveillance can be further differentiated by technological affordances. While voice calls only disclose the voices and tones of women, video calls make their images as well as their physical surroundings instantaneously visible (Peng, 2016). This results in a deepened disclosure of their private information. Thirdly, surveillance is not only restricted to dyadic communication via voice or video calls but also can be performed as multi-sided mobile communication (Ling & Lai, 2016). Group chats were found to expose women to collective attention and judgments, such as the commonly observed acts of urging single women to get married in their family groups by those of higher hierarchical statuses, and the public criticism of women’s professional performances in their workgroups. Lastly, in addition to all the surveillance enacted with the mobile phone as the media, the act of checking women’s physical phone itself functions as a particularly intrusive form of surveillance (Amraham, 2009). Examples included senior family members checking single migrant women’s phone to make sure that they were not engaged in underground dating. These intrusions were performed to detect hidden divergences from traditional gender expectations within women’s mobile phone practices. Mobile phone use thus enables multiple forms of surveillance which restrict women’s pursuit of individual autonomy and freedom.

Lastly, identification and surveillance can be leveraged to another, and final level - intervention. Intervention aims to impose absolute patriarchal control over women by actively enforcing behavior modification. The thesis finds that intervention ranges from controlling mobile phone use by women to

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their ownership of the mobile device. To further elaborate, the first type of intervention embodies restricting the mobile media affordances of women in order to deprive them of the autonomy to make independent choices. Examples include instances wherein husbands prohibited wives from using social mobile platforms for fear of their encountering male strangers online, thus reducing the possibilities of infidelity. Conversely, mobile phone use is only expected to foster women's adherence to traditional gender roles and power relationships. Intervention, under extreme circumstances, can include the confiscation of women's mobile devices for a complete ban on their use. It was not uncommon for fathers to confiscate the mobile phone of migrant daughters as punishment, upon discovery of hidden (suspected) romantic relationships. As a result, in an era when the mobile phone is now becoming "an identity on the move" (Fortunati, 2001, p. 85), intervention with women's mobile phone use is almost equivalent to domination over their gender identities, coercing them to stay subjugated to traditional gender practices.

The theoretical contribution of these three progressive steps, from identification to surveillance to intervention, has broader implications on understanding mobile phone use as a controlling factor for marginalized groups and individuals. Prior scholarship has foregrounded the socially constraining facets of mobile phone use. To name a few, the mobile gadget owned by Norwegian teens allowed surveillance from their parents upon their adolescent transformation (Ling, & Yttri, 2002); the mobile phone formed "a micro-electronic panopticon" (Peng & Choi, 2016, p. 561) in South China factory to place workers under continuous managerial control and surveillance; as noted before, mobile phone use facilitated migrant husbands in Senegalese

transnational marriages to enforce suspicion, control, and surveillance on their left-behind wives (Hannaford, 2015). This thesis goes deeper than its predecessors, unfolding the complexity and diversity of mobile phone use that produces constraining social impacts. More importantly, this thesis pieces these nuances of mobile phone use together, presenting a progressive process under which mobile phone use reinforces social constraints upon agency in a sequential manner. It is important to note that theoretical contribution of this thesis lies in providing a framework for future studies to take references from and make their adaptation to fit specific socio-cultural contexts. To specify, the constraining processes generated from mobile phone use in other contexts might not exactly follow the linear sequence of the above three steps, and possibly only entail one or two of them.

5.1.2 Strengthened agency for strategic responses

There is an opposing process that contrasts with that of intersectional socio-structural forces depressing agency. This thesis proposes the second part of the theoretical framework in which agency acts on structures via mobile phone use in four successive ways – avoidance, accommodation, personal development, and collaboration. Rather than strictly following a chronological order, the sequence reflects the successively strengthened agency of women to strive for freedom of expression and personal choices. In its simplest form, avoidance is a means of protecting oneself from surveillance and control without confrontation. However, when one cannot avoid, accommodation is a strategy where obedience is superficially manifest as a moral cover to justify one's pursuit of personal interests and desires. Closely accompanying this lies the engagement in personal development. Finally, collaboration clusters

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individuals in small groups to share social and informational support, moving towards the emergence of collective female power.

First, avoidance is widely adopted by women as a form of “passive resistance” (Kandiyoti, 1988, p. 274). This is different from extensive scholarly discussion that centers on mobile phone use by women to confront patriarchal oppression (Oreglia & Srinivasan, 2016; Somolu, 2007; Wallis, 2010). Women are cautious about the adoption of overtly resistant stances due to their repeated marginalized experiences. Instead, acts of passive resistance are enacted with the aid of the mobile phone to avoid patriarchal surveillance and control. This avoidance strategy is composed of two parts: “*blocking*” and “*deleting*”. The “*blocking*” affordance first allows women to exclude unwanted people and disturbances from their private spaces. For instance, women were able to block harassment messages from male colleagues, and also rejected “Friends Invitation” from male strangers online who primarily sought casual sex. Additionally, if people of higher patriarchal statuses, such as managers and senior family members, intruded into spaces blocked to them, the affordance of “*deleting*” allowed women to erase records of mobile phone use that they intended to hide, protecting their private autonomy and freedom. Examples can be seen in single women removing communicative records with boyfriends in order to conceal their relationships from family members who checked their phone.

Secondly, when women have to face patriarchal oppression and provide a direct response, avoidance gives way to accommodation. In contrast to the pursuit of equal gender rights advocated by western feminists (Connell, 1987; Risman, 2004), women of limited social status are mainly able to gain social

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resources for personal goals by visibly performing their subordination to the patriarchal order (Agarwal, 1997; Ramamurthy, 2000; Sen, 1987). In doing so, women can obtain a moral cover to justify making personal choices. In these cases, the mobile phone acts as the tool to strengthen women's performance of essentialist notions of femininity (Chib & Chen, 2011; Nguyen, Chib, & Mahalingham, 2017; Peng & Wong, 2013). The findings show that women took the initiative to let senior family members guide their mobile phone use. Permission from family members towards the entry of men into their mobile spaces thus became their justification to proceed with further intimate interactions.

Thirdly, beneath the surface-level accommodation lies women's use of mobile phones to seek personal development. Such a strategy becomes executable, as the phone opens up multiple spaces for women to enact different social relationships. While some spaces are particularly reserved for continued practices of traditional gender roles and power relationships, others are concealed by women to connect themselves with broader public mobile spaces to meet new people and absorb modern gender articulations of sex, love, and marriage. Women even utilize these relatively private mobile spaces to transform their new understandings of being women into practice. For example, in this thesis, WeChat workgroups became platforms for women with newly gained leadership to establish their authority as well as to shift the gender discourses within these groups to favor female workers.

At the fourth stage of collaboration, mobile phone use allows individuals to cluster and collaborate in small groups. These groups facilitate the sharing of social and informational support amongst women to aggregate

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their collective power, albeit only at a meso-level (Chib, 2010; Chib & Chen, 2011). As revealed in this thesis, WeChat workgroups provided women with public communicative spaces to collectively confront male colleagues, sometimes with provocative words. Within these groups, women supported one another to articulate coarse swear-words and sexually flirtatious language, which they would not dare to do when facing men alone, demands further investigation into the gender negotiations enabled by the group chatting affordance of the mobile phone.

In addition, voice calls connected physically separated women to circulate information about job opportunities. This was done in two ways. Firstly, migrant women delivered messages about the outside world to their left-behind female village fellows to encourage their migration to urban factories. Alternatively, job opportunities from a variety of places could be gathered and compared by migrant women to make more informed choices. Unlike previous strategies that merely restrict women to individual changes and growth, the strategy of collaboration goes beyond the personal development, often hidden, to more visible disobedience and confrontation, producing direct impacts upon gender power relationships to favor themselves.

The four strategies foster the dynamic and ongoing empowering processes arising from mobile phone use. Such processes challenge the prevailing definition of empowerment as an immediate arrival of women's equal decision-making power as men in both personal and professional realms (see Ahmed, Islam, Hasan, & Rahman, 2006; Hossain & Beresford, 2012; Huyer & Sikoska, 2003; Munyua, 2009; Svensson & Wamala Larsson, 2016; Wallis, 2011). Instead, mobile phone use is more likely to involve women in

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empowering processes in a state of flux. Alongside the evolving processes of getting empowered, women, firstly, are found to gradually transform hidden resistances via the acts of avoidance and accommodation to the pursuit of their interests and desires above the surface that is embodied in the strategies for personal development and collaboration. In the meanwhile, under these processes, mobile phone use is step-by-step empowering women to converge individual resistances towards the rise of collective power, multiplying women's mutual support for the growth of their independence and the management of their confrontation with patriarchal oppression under certain circumstances.

5.2 Individual, interactional, and institutional gender transformation

In the research context of post-Mao China, the constraining yet simultaneously empowering processes arising from mobile phone use play a part in intensifying gender struggles faced by female rural-urban migrant workers, engaging them further to the conflicts between obedience to traditional gender norms, and their modern desires for autonomy and freedom. The author argues that doing so explicitly exposes them to the fluid exploration of the social meanings embodied in their gender roles and power relationships, thereby catalyzing their gender transformation embedded in the ‘individual, interactional, and institutional dimensions’ (Risman, 2004: 429).

5.2.1 Nascent self-consciousness, migrant gender culture in the making

At the individual level, we notice women’s embrace of self-consciousness. It arises from specific mobile practices, as demonstrated in the strategies of avoidance and accommodation, which allow for their subtle deviations from structural rules while opening up hidden spaces to touch upon autonomy and social freedom. It is worth noting that, this self-consciousness is distinguished from the western notion of feminist consciousness that directs women towards making overt demands for equal decision-making power between the genders (Mohanty, 1988). In the meanwhile, it embodies resistance against tradition, manifesting a sense of personal growth – the nascent awareness of their own worth, interests, and desires beyond traditional definitions. As widely observed, women expressed their reflections upon rural gender values, stating that they were “no worse than men”.

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The mobile mediated connection plays a part in leveraging the individual shifts into interactional-level gender transformation. Before elaboration, it is worth noting that, nearly one decade ago, Qiu (2009) highlighted the connection amongst working-class people in China, which arises from the extended penetration of the mobile phone and other inexpensive ICT devices and facilities throughout the Chinese society. He further proposes how this connection gave rise to the working-class network society, where flows of information could circulate, and geographically scattered people belong to this class could get united to foster their discursive power and social movements.

Differently, this thesis, as noted before, illuminates the gender dimension when probing into the social impacts stemming out of the technologically mediated connection. As revealed in the findings, with the aid of the mobile phone, the connection amongst women enables their collaboration to further address their interests and desires. While mobile communication facilitates women's exchange of job information and social support across geographical boundaries, mobile messaging groups offer them platforms to negotiate and display collective confrontations when faced with structural oppression.

The mobile enabled collaboration in succession engages women into the discursive and practical construction and negotiation of their unique gender culture. This gender culture, belonging to this group of migrant women, is differentiated from modern feminist thinking prevailing the western world as well as traditionally rooted gender norms. To specify, this culture does not promote feminist activities that move towards structural subversion. Instead, it

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focuses on the collective rise of women's independence. Such independence, for instance, can arise from their construction of mobile supported social networks which make them more informed regarding job selection to making their own migrant decisions. This mobile enabled independence would lead to their reduced reliance upon male authority, thus further laying the foundation of their obtainment of more autonomy and social freedom while devastating the social influences exerted by traditional gender culture.

5.2.2 Institutional structural shifts: Continuity and change

Whether such collaboration enacted at the interactional level, accompanied by the rise of collective feminist power, will eventually transform institutional structures remains a complex question. What we can observe is an asymmetry of "continuity and change" (Tacoli, 1999: 658). While the continuity lies in mobile practices that sustain structural rules via facilitating access to women for a further imposing of surveillance and intervention, the change stems out of women's mobile phone use to alter and re-shape their situated institutional structures with the purpose of addressing their discursive power and decision-making power.

Especially, the intersectional approach can help explain the emergence of the asymmetry. As noted in the literature review, the perspective of intersectionality (see Collins, 2002; Crenshaw, 1989) allows for the understanding of how gender, class, race/ethnicity, and(or) other social structures may work together to shape differentiated social positions of marginalized women. For instance, as we observed, female group leaders in the factory, formerly sharing similarly restricted gender status as ordinary female workers, obtained higher socio-economic status through their leadership. Their

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relatively advantageous social positions compared to their female subordinates further equipped them with the discursive power and authority in WeChat workgroups. This subsequently offered their social resources to hit the glass ceiling in the factory, which further transformed the prevailing patriarchal structure in their professional sphere. Under comparison, mobile practices were more likely to continuously entrap ordinary female workers to surveillance and control. That is why the continuity and change which are conflicted with each other can co-exist in the frame of institutional structural shifts.

Therefore, the author comes to the question – whether the continuity and change will keep on going in parallel? Specifically, in the case of rural-urban female migrant workers, whether the mobile enabled change would eventually alter and shift their situated institutional structures across the domestic and professional spheres? Or, whether the structural constraints will continue via the aid of the mobile phone, engulfing the possible changes? To answer these questions may demand methodological changes for future research. Given the dynamically negotiated nature of mobile practices, longitudinal research (Van de Ven and Huber, 1990) may enable the documentation of how the mobile mediated institutional transformation evolves over time. This can further embed our understanding of the social impacts of the mobile device into the fluid societal transitions of China across the temporal dimension.

Chapter 6 Future theoretical development

This chapter focuses on proposing two possible directions for advancing the conceptualization of mobile phone use in gender transformation. Firstly, attention is demanded to how to define the term of “mobile phone use”, given its possible shifted social meanings alongside the mobile technological innovation. Secondly, further thought should be placed upon the nuances of “information have-less” (Cartier, Castells, & Qiu, 2005; Qiu, 2009), uncovering its heterogeneity in terms of digital access and literacy.

6.1 Definition of mobile phone use

The past two decades have witnessed the evolvement of mobile technology for marginalized women in developing nations. Especially, many marginalized women are becoming relatively economically capable and digitally literate for adopting and using more advanced mobile technology (Stork, Calandro, & Gillwald, 2013). They have abandoned the basic phone with affordances limited to voice calls, text-based messages. Also, they have walked away from the feature phone that expands the function a bit by including the mobile camera, music player and Web browser. Instead, the smartphone is now becoming increasingly popular amongst them, performing as the personal computer-telephone hybrid (see Madianou, 2014; Nguyen et al., 2017; Wallis, 2015) that “can host practically unlimited combinations of apps and include a wide range of sensors and interfaces” (Humphreys, Karnowski, and von Pape, 2018, p. 2795).

The smartphone is largely re-shaping women’s experiences regarding mobile phone use. Consider those brand-new mobile media affordances emerging from the operating system of the smartphone, such as location-based

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social networking (Küpper, 2005) and mobile payment (Schierz, Schilke, & Wirtz, 2010). The ongoing integration of artificial intelligence into the smartphone is further revolutionizing mobile practices, enabling a closer convergence between human body and technology, which is embodied in the affordances of finger-print (Derawi, Yang, & Busch, 2011) and facial recognition (Hadid, Heikkilä, Silvén, & Pietikainen, 2007). Looking into the future, the possible combination of augmented reality with mobile devices may foster the arrival of mobile virtual reality (Computerworld, 2017), which would subsequently offer alternative channels for users to get connected across the boundaries of time and space. In summary, the rapid advancement of mobile technology is giving rise to burgeoning media affordances, which demands an in-depth reflection upon the definition of mobile phone use, and more importantly, the nuanced social meanings associated with it.

The theory of polymedia provides one possible lens. With *poly* retrieved from a Greek word, meaning many or several, this term was coined by Madianou and Miller (2012, 2013) against the backdrop of the prosperity of new media. They stated that, an integrated media environment is taking shape, which constitutes of the proliferation of media and the convergence of different medium in varied manners. To illustrate, in the environment of polymedia, “each individual medium or platform is defined in relational terms in the context of all other media” (Madianou and Miller 2012, 170), instead of “a list of discrete objects and technologies” ((Madianou 2014, 672). Such examples can be traced from the hybridity of short message service (SMS) and a social media platform on WeChat (Harwit 2017), and the integration of SMS and location-based social search service on Tinder (Ward 2017). Users can navigate

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this polymedia environment to compare and select the media affordance for better management of emotional needs and social relationships (Peng, 2016).

The polymedia approach can find echoes in the findings that women strategically selected mobile media affordances to converge to reach their communicative purposes. For instance, some women chose to combine dyadic communicative characteristics – synchronicity, and voice transmission - dialing up male strangers online, for the purpose of obtaining a better understanding of the men on the other side of the phone. Similar examples can be found in women's bridging asynchronous messages with image transmission, sending "*photoshopped*" pictures of themselves to men for a beautified presentation of their self-images.

However, the author would like to note that, while polymedia addressing the convergence of mobile media affordances, the findings reveal an opposing phenomenon— women's deliberate separation of convergent mobile media affordances for different social purposes, or more precisely, for the management of their multi-faceted gender identities. Such mobile phone use was widely observed in cases when women attempt to achieve the goal of accommodating with traditional gender expectations above the surface of their hidden pursuit of modern desires. For example, as noted above, women reserved traditional mobile communicative channels, such as voice calls and text messages, to their family members to extend their superficial adherence to gender roles in rural households. Behind this facade, they blocked family members from their mobile social media platforms and shared these spaces with their peers and other new social relationships made in urban areas for the construction and negotiation of a modern self in urban areas.

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This observation can find similar views in prior studies. For instance, Wallis notes (2015) the separated usage of the smartphone by Chinese female migrant workers and its differentiated gender impacts. Although her focus was on how daily mobile phone practices, such as calling and messaging, restricted women further to the margin of urban areas, she points out a very different phenomenon – women’s use of mobile cameras for selfies, which contrastingly allowed them to temporarily immerse themselves into modern fantasies. With an emphasis on maternal practices by migrant Filipina domestic workers, Chib, Malik, Aricat, and Kadir (2014) indicate that, while women preferred to deploy text messaging and dialing to deliver the care to their left-behind children, some of them kept social media platforms as their private spaces to meet men and experience underground romance in host societies. These phenomena, documented within and beyond this thesis, provoke critiques of the media convergence highly valued by the theory of polymedia, and thereby pointing out another direction of theorizing socially marginalized women’s mobile phone use.

6.2 Nuances of the information have-less

It is worth noting that, nowadays, while the smartphone is becoming increasingly popular amongst the group of women who can afford it and are digitally capable of its operation, the other group of women with less technology access and restricted digital literacy tend to be left behind. In this thesis, the widened digital differentiation was observed, lying between young migrant women of their 20s and 30s, and those elder ones in 40s and 50s.

Compared to tech-savvy young women who widely owned the smartphone, the elder women were found to limit their mobile device to those particularly designed for elder people, with the functions confined to voice calls and texting. They reported themselves as “*being too old to learn*” new technological skills or finding “*no need*” to replace their current phones with the smartphone. In terms of mobile phone use, the young women were capable of navigating amongst various mobile media affordances for managing different interpersonal relationships and obtaining new information about the outside world. Under comparison, elder women were more likely to be restricted to voice calls, mainly with their left-behind family members. It is important to note that, the divided mobile phone adoption and practices is playing a part in shaping the differentiated gender views and behaviors of young and elder migrant women, showing the tendency of allowing for more space for the young ones to pursue individual autonomy and freedom while bonding the elder closer with values prevailing their rural households and communities.

Given the deepened industrialization and digitalization processes in the context of post-Mao China, this digital divide within the group of female migrant workers demands specific attention. The on-going fourth industrial

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revolution, characterized by advancement of supercomputing and incorporation of artificial intelligence into machine operations (Schwab, 2017), keeps on driving the emergence of the digitally differentiated labor force. While some tech-savvy migrant women may integrate themselves as part of the “digital working class” (Qiu, 2018, p.5) to engage in the production of technologically innovated industry and utilize technology development for their benefits, others might be faced with technological marginalization across professional advancement and personal well-being.

This may further evoke critiques of the term “information have-less” (Cartier, Castells, & Qiu, 2005). This term was coined to refer to the group of working-class people in developing nations falling into the strata between those information haves and have-nots. Compared to information haves, they are economically restricted and less digitally literate in ICT adoptions and usage. However, they are differentiated from information have-nots, having access to inexpensive ICTs, including low-end mobile devices, and skills of appropriating the technology for social networking towards information, ideas, and physical mobility flows (Qiu, 2009).

However, today, under the name of information have-less, digital differentiation is observed to take place amongst this group of people, as their social resources of technology are varied. For instance, in this thesis, those young female migrant workers in China might be comparatively privileged in mobile phone use compared to the elderly ones. Therefore, future research may pay attention to the heterogeneity beneath the information have-less, uncovering their possibly divided mobile phone practices and furthermore, how these stratified practices may give rise to differentiated gender impacts.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

The theoretical implications of this thesis can be generalized well beyond the narrow context of post-Mao China. The thesis advances our current understanding of the association between the globally diffused mobile phone and socially marginalized women in vast developing nations, whose development trajectories have been tremendously re-shaped by the globalized penetration of western capitalist modernity (Hefner, 2011; Piot, 1999; Schäbler & Stenberg, 2004). In the present era of globalization, numerous developing nations are undergoing unprecedented encounters between their indigenous cultures and modernity, across political-economic as well as socio-cultural dimensions (Liu, 2011; McCloud, 1995; Rudolph & Rudolph, 1984). This behavior is akin to emergent and transitioning contemporary Chinese society.

Consequently, preserved influences from traditionally defined social orders are juxtaposed with increasingly underscored individual freedom and aspirations, fostering a complicated and pluralized transformation of people in these developing nations (Inkeles, 1975; Ocholla-Ayayo, 1997). Such transformation is reflected in the gender struggles of women in their daily lives and work, especially in those of socially marginalized positions (Little, 1973; Moghadam, 2003; Wolf, 1992).

Similar to Chinese female rural-urban migrant workers, these marginalized women are caught between multi-faceted social constraints that shackle them to traditional patriarchal orders, and forces from modernity that encourage them towards a life of free personal choice and expression. To illustrate, consider “factory daughters” in massively industrialized rural Java who tunnel back and forth between their traditional roles as daughters and new

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identities as factory workers (Wolf, 1992), “modernizing women” under the modernization processes of the Middle East whose nascent aspirations of social freedom fly in the face of religious doctrine (Moghadam, 2003), and “African women in towns” who have to cope with co-existing traditional and modern elements in their continuously urbanized societies (Little, 1973). These women are neither feminist activists capable of protesting modern notions of gender equality, nor powerless victims confined to routinized traditional gender practices. For these struggling women, mobile phones are neither the guarantee for a fundamentally shifted gender status nor threats to deepened marginalized experiences.

This thesis contributes theoretically to examine the largely ignored conceptual middle-ground – the double-faceted role of mobile phone use that simultaneously serves to constrain and empower women. Specifically, this lens suggests the examination of women’s mobile phone use within the larger scheme of their situated societies, and perception of its gender impacts as a social process rather than a binary outcome. On one hand, from a top-down perspective, this lens captures how intersecting socio-structural constraints central to women’s lives can appropriate their mobile phone use to further suppress their agency. On the other hand, from a bottom-up perspective, this lens unfolds how women, rather than yielding to silent sufferings, act as resilient and subversive agents, grasping all possible social resources to devise strategies of mobile phone use in their pursuit of autonomy and freedom.

It is important to note that techno-determinism is avoided – it is not a guarantee that mobile phone use will always lead them to the achievement of equal decision-making power in environments with the power imbalance.

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Nevertheless, attention should still be drawn to acts of hidden and active resistances, often carried out in subtle and non-confrontational manners. This is important because, under most circumstances, the socially restricted agency of women only allows them to engage in the construction of a modern self to fulfill personal worth and aspirations, beneath the façade of maintaining gender practices of a traditionally expected self (see Chib & Chen, 2011; Chib & Nguyen, 2018; Nguyen, Chib, & Mahalingham, 2017; Wang, 2007). Perhaps, such mobile phone-aided resistance may lead to the accumulation of women's power to foster more transformative and sustainable social change.

Appendix

Appendix A

Picture 1 Location of Dalian city

Appendix B

Picture 2 Location of Paotai

Appendix C

Picture 3 City square of Paotai

Appendix C

Picture 4 Villages at the outskirts of Paotai

Appendix C

Picture 5 City playground of Paotai

Appendix C

Picture 6 City center of Paotai

Appendix D

Picture 7 Inner structure of factory

Appendix E

Picture 8 *Beilou*

Appendix F

Picture 9 Industrial area

Appendix F

Picture 10 Industrial area

Appendix G

Picture 11 A male supervisor watching women doing work

Appendix H

Picture 12 Production shop floor

Appendix H

Picture 13 Production shop floor

Appendix I

Picture 14 Label attachment and quality inspection shop floor

Appendix I

Picture 15 Label attachment and quality inspection shop floor

Appendix I

Picture 16 A female worker using her mobile phone to check the purity of fruit cans

Appendix J

Picture 17 A male worker driving forklift

Appendix K

Picture 18 Dormitories of workers

Appendix K

Picture 19 Internal structure of a dormitory

Appendix L

Picture 20 The isolated space in shop floors to conduct interview

Appendix M

Informed Consent Form

You are invited to participate in an interview survey as part of project conducted by Phd student PEI Xin and her supervisor - Associate Professor Arul Indrasen Chib from Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

Your participation is entirely **voluntary**. All information will be kept completely **anonymous and confidential**. There will be no reference made in oral or written reports which could link you to this study. Data collected in this study will be maintained for three years after completion and then deleted. **You do not need to tell us your real names or the names of other people other than your own signature on the Informed Consent Form.**

This interview aims at achieving a better understanding of how mobile phone use is related to your daily lives, work, and the feeling of being man/woman. This interview will be conducted face-to-face. In this interview, you will be asked to share your experience and perspective about your mobile phone use, and life stories related to your gender roles such as being father/mother, son/daughter, husband/wife, or boyfriend/girlfriend. **You will get a coupon worth \$10 after completing one-hour interview. Payment will be given only after completion of one-hour interview. It will be good for us to take audio-record in the interview for later transcription and analysis. But if you feel uncomfortable about taking record, we will shut the audio-equipment, and take notes by hand instead.**

If you are willing to lead us to your workplace and your home to learn more about your life after interview, that's will be a great experience for us to

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share your life stories. If you refuse to do so, we show our complete understanding.

Though no discomfort is anticipated while participating in this study, **you can withdraw your participation at any time during the process without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.** You are not expected to answer any questions that you are not comfortable with. Further, we anticipate that you will enjoy the research process to reflect on your mobile phone use and gender roles.

You can call us at 65-65148390 or send us an email at arulchib@ntu.edu.sg to ask for a copy of the results of this study. If you have any concerns about this study or your experience as a participant, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Nanyang Technological University at 65-65922495 (collect calls will be accepted if you state you are a study participant) or email: irb@ntu.edu.sg.

Signature_____

Date_____

同意书

本研究由新加坡南洋理工大学黄金辉传播学院博士生裴馨以及她的导师 Arul Chib 副教授组织。您的参与对我们来说意义重大，希望您能接受我们的访问。

您的参与完全基于自愿的前提。我们向您保证，您的所有信息我们都会以匿名的方式给予保护，并且在三年之后删除。除了在同意书上的签名，您无需向我们透露您的真实姓名以及别人的真实姓名。

此次研究的目的是为了更好了解您的手机使用如何与您的生活和工作相联系，从而影响您作为男人 / 女人的感受体验。在此次面对面的交流中，您可以与我们的研究者分析您的手机使用状况，以及手机使用如何影响您性别角色的体验，例如作为父亲 / 母亲， 儿子 / 女儿，丈夫 / 妻子，以及男朋友 / 女朋友的体验。仅在完成访问后，您会获得 50RMB 现金。如果您在访问期间接受录音，会大大方便我们之后的研究工作。如果您拒绝录音，我们会用笔录的方式取代。

如果您愿意带我们去参观您工作和生活的地方，这样会方便我们更好地了解您。但是如果您拒绝这么做，我们表示完全理解。

此次研究不会给您带来不便。如果您在访问中感到不舒服，您可以随时拒绝继续接受采访。您不会因此受到任何惩罚或利益的损失。您也可以不回答让您感到不舒服的问题。除此之外，我们希望您可以享受整个访问的过程。

您可以拨打电话 65-65148390 或者写邮件至 arulchib@ntu.edu.sg 来获取本研究的结果。如果您作为研究的参与者感觉到不舒服，您可以拨打南洋理工大学的评审委员机构的电话 65-65922495 或者发送邮件到 irb@ntu.edu.sg，拨打电话或发送邮件时请表明您是研究参与者。

签名 _____

日期_____

Appendix N

Interview guide

Part 1 Basic demographic information

- How to address you?
- May I ask your age and hometown?
- How long have you been working in this factory?
- How did you come to this factory?
- Did you work in other places before this factory?
- Are you using mobile phone? Which type of phone you have?

Part 2 Mobile phone use in personal lives

- Whom you contact often on phone?
- Through which communicative way (SMS, dialling, App, or others),
you often contact the person (or people)?
 - Could you remember your latest contact with the person? (This question is a breakthrough point to get more details about the respondent's personal mobile phone use.)
 - Anything interesting or special things happening between you and the person?
 - Could you elaborate?
 - Why mobile connection with the person is so important to you? (Here, let the respondent elaborate gender power relationships with their frequently connected ones.)
 - Anyone else do you always contact? (Here, follow previous questions to elicit elaboration from the respondent.)

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- Do you have online friends on phone?
- (If yes) How did you meet the person online, through which app?
- What do you normally chat with the online friend (Let the respondent go deeper about her experiences)?
- Do your family members (husbands, parents, or other family relatives) know you meet people online?
- (If this is a secret) Why you hide it from your family?
- The last question – amongst all your gender roles (mother, wife, daughter or any other, adjusted based on the respondent's life experience), which one you think is the most important for you?
- Do you feel it is difficult to fulfil this gender role, and why (Here, more questions will be asked to let the respondent elaborate the conflicts met by them)?

Part 3 Mobile phone use for work

- Do you use mobile phone for work?
- How do you use phone, whom you contact often, and in which way?
- Could you elaborate your last time using mobile phone for work issues?
(Have more details about stories from respondent)
- Do you have any special or interesting experiences in this regard?
- Can you imagine doing work without a phone?
- Do you feel phone benefit your work (also, ask for elaboration)?
- Do you feel phone bring your trouble at work (elaboration)?
- (If respondent does not mention job searching on phone) Do you get job information on phone?

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- Do you communicate job information with others (Elaboration)?
- (If the respondent does not use phone for job information) How do you normally get job information?
- Why you do not control your job information by yourself?
- Do you have any plan after this factory?

Appendix O

Picture 21 Screenshots of WeChat workgroups

Appendix O

Picture 22 Screenshots of MoMo – Male invitation to add friend

Appendix P**Table 1 Respondents from fieldwork of 2015**

No	Age	Sex	Hometown	Marital Status	Have children or not	Work status in the factory	Mobile phone
No.1	25	F	Heilongjiang	Married	Y	Worker of label attachment shop floor	Smartphone
No.2	35	F	Heilongjiang	Married	Y	Worker of label attachment shop floor	Smartphone
No. 3	23	F	Heilongjiang	Married	N	Worker of label attachment shop floor	Smartphone
No.4	32	F	Heilongjiang	Divorced	Y	Group leader of production shop floor	Smartphone

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No.5	23	F	Jilin	Single	N	Worker of quality inspection shop floor	Smartphone
No.6	34	F	Jilin	Married	Y	Group leader of quality inspection shop floor	Smartphone
No.7	25	F	Heilongjiang	Married	Y	Worker of label attachment shop floor	Smartphone
No.8	28	F	Liaoning	Married	Y	Worker of label attachment shop floor	Just broke her smartphone
No.9	30	M	Northeast China	Single	N	Worker of label attachment shop floor	Smartphone
No.10	24	M	Local	Single	N	Worker of label attachment shop floor	Smartphone
No.11	20	F	Heilongjiang	Single	N	Worker of quality inspection shop floor	Smartphone

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No.12	20	F	Heilongjiang	Single	N	Worker of quality inspection shop floor	Smartphone
No.13	20	F	Liaoning	Single	N	Worker of quality inspection shop floor	Smartphone
No.14	20	M	Liaoning	Single	N	Group leader of quality inspection shop floor	Smartphone
No.15	25	F	Jilin	Single	N	Worker of quality inspection shop floor	Smartphone
No.16	27	F	Henan	Married	Y	Group leader of label attachment shop floor	Smartphone
No.17	25	M	Heilongjiang	Married	Y	Worker of label attachment shop floor	Smartphone
No.18	23	F	Jilin	Single	N	Worker of label attachment shop floor	Smartphone

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No.19	36	F	Jilin	Married	Y	Worker of label attachment shop floor	Smartphone
No.20	28	F	Heilongjiang	Married	Y	Worker of quality inspection shop floor	Feature phone
No.21	50	F	Heilongjiang	Married	Y	Seasonal worker of production shop floor	Feature phone
No.22	43	F	Heilongjiang	Married	Y	Seasonal worker of production shop floor	Feature phone
No.23	50	F	Heilongjiang	Married	Y	Seasonal worker of production shop floor	Feature phone
No.24	50	F	Jilin	Married	Y	Seasonal worker of production shop floor	Feature phone
No.25	50	F	Heilongjiang	Married	Y	Seasonal worker of production shop floor	Smartphone

Table 2 Demographic information of respondents from fieldwork of 2016

No.	Age	Sex	Hometown	Marital Status	Have children or not	Work status in the factory	Mobile phone
No.26	30	F	Jilin	Divorced;	Y	Worker of label attachment shop floor	Smartphone
No.27	27	F	Heilongjiang	Single	N	Worker of label attachment shop floor	Smartphone
No.28	26	F	Liaoning	Married	Y	Worker of label attachment shop floor	Smartphone
No.29	29	F	Heilongjiang	Married	Y	Worker of label attachment shop floor	Smartphone
No.30	48	F	Heilongjiang	Married	Y	Worker of label attachment shop floor	Smartphone

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No.31	20	F	Heilongjiang	Single	N	Worker of label attachment shop floor	Smartphone
No.32	26	F	Heilongjiang	Single	N	Worker of label attachment shop floor	Smartphone
No.33	30	F	Heilongjiang	Married	Y	Worker of label attachment shop floor	Smartphone
No.34	31	F	Inner Mongolia	Married	Y	Worker of label attachment shop floor	Smartphone
No.35	26	F	Heilongjiang	Married	Y	Worker of label attachment shop floor	Smartphone
No.36	25	M	Northeast China	Married	Y	Group leader of quality inspection shop floor	Smartphone
No.37	40	F	Jilin	Married	Y	Worker of quality inspection shop floor	Smartphone

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No.38	36	M	Heilongjiang	Married	Y	Group leader of label attachment shop floor	Smartphone
No.39	48	F	Jilin	Divorced	Y	Worker of label attachment shop floor	Smartphone
No.40	30	M	Northeast China	Single	N	Worker of quality inspection shop floor	Smartphone
No.41	31	F	Jilin	Single	N	Worker of quality inspection shop floor	Not using mobile phone
No.42	23	M	Northeast China	Single	N	Worker of quality inspection shop floor	Smartphone
No.43	40	F	Jilin	Married	Y	Worker of label attachment shop floor	Smartphone
No.44	25	M	Liaoning	Single	N	Worker of quality inspection shop floor	Smartphone

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No.45	30	F	Jilin	Married	Y	Worker of label attachment shop floor	Smartphone
No.46	30	M	Northeast China	Married	N	Group leader of label attachment shop floor	Smartphone
No.47	40	M	Inner Mongolia	Married	Y	Group leader of production shop floor	Smartphone
No.48	40	F	Inner Mongolia	Married	Y	Worker of production shop floor	Feature phone
No.49	50	F	Liaoning	Married	Y	Worker of production shop floor	Feature phone
No.50	45	F	Liaoning	Married	Y	Worker of production shop floor	Feature phone
No.51	48	F	Liaoning	Married	Y	Worker of production shop floor	Smartphone

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No.52	49	F	Liaoning	Married	Y	Worker of production shop floor	Smartphone
No.53	50	F	Liaoning	Divorced	Y	Worker of production shop floor	Smartphone
No.54	44	F	East China	Married	Y	Worker of quality inspection shop floor	Feature phone
No.55	43	M	Northeast China	Married	Y	Supervisor of production shop floor	Smartphone
No.56	30	M	South east China	Married	Y	Supervisor of label attachment shop floor	Smartphone
No.57	30	F	NA	NA	NA	Warehouse keeper of label attachment shop floor	Smartphone
No.58	40	M	NA	NA	NA	Associate manager	Smartphone

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No.59	NA	M	NA	NA	NA	Officer of Paotai sub-district	NA
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Appendix Q

Distribution of demographic information of respondents

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Appendix R

Table 3 Themes of findings, descriptions and examples

	Theme	Sub-theme	Description	Examples
Mobile phone use in the personal sphere	Negotiation with tradition of rural hometowns	Surveillance vs. Avoidance	Mobile phone use introduced women further to surveillance from family members, and simultaneously allowed women's avoidance to seek concealed autonomy.	<p>Surveillance:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The dyadic and synchronous voice calls made women available at any time and any place. 2. Visually instantaneous nature of video calls exposed women's images as well as physical surroundings. 3. Group chatting allowed multi-sided parties to engage in conversations at the same time, thus placing women under collective attention and judgement. 4. Checking women's phones to invade women's private mobile spaces for surveillance

Avoidance:

1. “Blocking” family members from some mobile spaces that were reserved to peers to share new concepts of being women
2. “Deleting” hidden communicative records to cope with family members’ checking phones

Intervention vs. Negotiation
via accommodation

On the one hand, mobile phone use facilitated intervention from family members with women’s personal life to place them under absolute control; on the other hand, mobile phone use enabled women to manifest superficial accommodation to the intervention, and thereby obtaining a moral shelter to veil their pursuit of personal choices.

Intervention:

1. Family members banned women’s access to some mobile media affordances.
2. Family members confiscated women’s mobile devices for a complete ban of their mobile phone use.

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Experiment with
modernity in
urban areas

Intrusion vs. Defence

Mobile phone use both exposed women to unwanted intrusion from men into their private mobile spaces, and facilitated women's enactment of strategic defence to filter men's entry.

Negotiation via accommodation:

Hiding pursuit of personal interests and desires beneath the surface of accommodating themselves with intervention from family members

Intrusion:

1. One-way telecommunication service allowing men to enforce themselves into private mobile connections with women
2. Location-based mobile social service enabling male strangers online to approach women in private

Defence:

1. Pulling men into the blacklist to prevent their further disturbance via traditional telecommunication service

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Personal information
exposure vs. Self-protection

After men's entry, mobile phone use provided men with multiple channels to pry into women's privacy, and empowered women with a variety of methods for self-protection.

2. Devising strategies to filter online male strangers into more private and intimate interactions

Personal information exposure:

Men, especially online male strangers, usually progressed from text-based messages, to photo-based messages, to voice calls, and eventually video calls to obtain more private information of women.

Self-protection:

1. Asynchronous communicative characteristic allowed women to reply to men with revised personal information, such as "*photoshopped*" pictures of themselves to show a beautified image.

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Mobile phone use in the professional sphere

Negotiation with patriarchal management

Subservience vs. Equality

While mobile phone use reinforced subservience of women to capitalist mode of production, it also allowed women opportunities to seek equality when communicating with those of management positions.

Subservience:

1. Work chat groups were established of all ranks, from general managers to ordinary workers, to duplicate the hierarchal system of the factory, benefiting top-down vertical flows of work orders and notifications.

2. Synchronous communicative channels without visual exposure, such as voice calls, enabled women to learn more about men without exposing their physical appearances.
3. Affordances that gave women knowledge about any overlapping social relationships with men provided them with another means of self-protection.

2. Work chat groups allowed work updates from the bottom to managers; Especially, women were required to report their work status one-by-one in groups, and management would criticize their mistakes publicly to embarrass them in front of their peers.
3. Supplementing management through group chats, voice calls enabled management to reach any woman at any time and in any place.
4. Voice call allowed management relatively private spaces to talk to women, where they could “rebuke” (*Xun 训*) women as much as they liked, without the need to mind their images as in chat groups.

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Gender stereotype vs.
Professional growth

Mobile phone use enhanced the prevailing gender stereotype in the workplace that devalued the leadership capability of women; however, mobile phone use facilitated women's professional growth, particularly those gaining leadership positions of workgroups to establish their own authority.

Equality:

Looking for relatively equal communication where women were connected with management in a non-professional manner

Gender stereotype:

Mobile phone use enabled shop-floor supervisors to skip female group leaders to take control over ordinary workers directly.

Professional growth:

1. Mobile phone use facilitated women of group leader positions to incorporate themselves into the management; they copied the capitalist mode of management from their leaders to control workers under their leadership.

Resistance against patriarchal oppression from male peers

Exhibition of male authority vs. Collective confrontation

Mobile phone use, especially chat groups, provided male workers with public spaces to exhibit their authority in front of women, and in the meanwhile, enabled women to collaborate with one another to show their collective confrontation.

Exhibition of male authority:

2. Mobile phone use allowed female group leaders to shift gender discourse of their groups, giving their chat groups feminist names, such as “*Our world is under our control*” and “*Women’s group*”.

1. underscoring their superior patriarchal positions upon women in chat groups, such as raising themselves as “*big brother*” (*Dage* 大哥) or “*big father*” (*Daba* 大爸) in front of women
2. proposing gender-divided topics in groups, such as drinking-related topic, which was traditionally framed as inappropriate for

Chinese women to
engage in

3. belittling women via
sexually provocative and
flirtatious words,
including
initiating invitations to
sex

Collective confrontation:

1. Whenever encountering
men's attempts to
leverage them to higher
patriarchal status,
women replied with
curse words such as
“*You suck*” and “*Fuck
you*” to show their
contempt, and
furthermore, called
themselves “*the sister of
your grandma*” (*Yilao* 姨
姥), to seek for a more
authoritative position
above men.

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2. Instead of avoiding the gender-divided topics, women responded with humiliation of ego of men; for instance, faced with the drinking-related topic, women put forward their better capability of handling alcohols, replying, *“I still could write after drinking two bottles of alcohols.”*
3. As response to men’s sexually provocative and flirtatious words, women collaborated with one another to take advantage of men sexually.

Male-dominant migration vs. Emergent female social networks

Mobile phone use allowed male migrant workers to take control over women’s job information, and contradictorily, aided the emergence of social networks

Male-dominant migration: Mobile phone use upheld men’s dominance over women’s job information, and therefore maintaining

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amongst women to circulate job advice and social support.

their decision-making power over women's migration.

Emergent female social networks:

1. Voice calls allowed migrant women to provide instant job advice and social support to their left-behind female cohorts in villages, encouraging their migration.
2. Migrant women also called one another to communicate job opportunities in different places for a better decision of next destination.

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