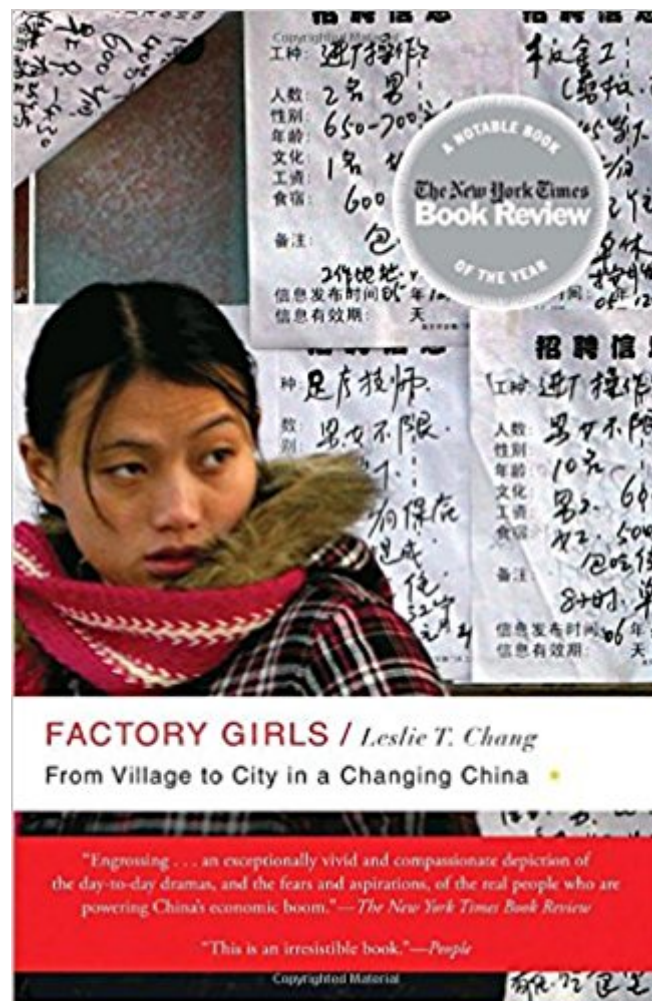


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# Factory Girls: From Village To City In A Changing China



## Synopsis

An eye-opening and previously untold story, *Factory Girls* is the first look into the everyday lives of the migrant factory population in China. China has 130 million migrant workers—the largest migration in human history. In *Factory Girls*, Leslie T. Chang, a former correspondent for the *Wall Street Journal* in Beijing, tells the story of these workers primarily through the lives of two young women, whom she follows over the course of three years as they attempt to rise from the assembly lines of Dongguan, an industrial city in China's Pearl River Delta. As she tracks their lives, Chang paints a never-before-seen picture of migrant life—a world where nearly everyone is under thirty; where you can lose your boyfriend and your friends with the loss of a mobile phone; where a few computer or English lessons can catapult you into a completely different social class. Chang takes us inside a sneaker factory so large that it has its own hospital, movie theater, and fire department; to posh karaoke bars that are fronts for prostitution; to makeshift English classes where students shave their heads in monklike devotion and sit day after day in front of machines watching English words flash by; and back to a farming village for the Chinese New Year, revealing the poverty and idleness of rural life that drive young girls to leave home in the first place. Throughout this riveting portrait, Chang also interweaves the story of her own family's migrations, within China and to the West, providing historical and personal frames of reference for her investigation. A book of global significance that provides new insight into China, *Factory Girls* demonstrates how the mass movement from rural villages to cities is remaking individual lives and transforming Chinese society, much as immigration to America's shores remade our own country a century ago.

## Book Information

Paperback: 420 pages

Publisher: Spiegel & Grau (August 4, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0385520182

ISBN-13: 978-0385520188

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.9 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 12 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 188 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #27,844 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #3 in Books > Travel > Asia >

China > General #16 in Books > Textbooks > Humanities > History > Asia #16 in Books >

## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Chang, a former Beijing correspondent for the Wall Street Journal, explores the urban realities and rural roots of a community, until now, as unacknowledged as it is massive—China's 130 million workers whose exodus from villages to factory and city life is the largest migration in history. Chang spent three years following the successes, hardships and heartbreaks of two teenage girls, Min and Chunming, migrants working the assembly lines in Dongguan, one of the new factory cities that have sprung up all over China. The author's incorporation of their diaries, e-mails and text messages into the narrative allows the girls—with their incredible ambition and youth—to emerge powerfully upon the page. Dongguan city is itself a character, with talent markets where migrants talk their way into their next big break, a lively if not always romantic online dating community and a computerized English language school where students shave their heads like monks to show commitment to their studies. A first generation Chinese-American, Chang uses details of her own family's immigration to provide a vivid personal framework for her contemporary observations. A gifted storyteller, Chang plumbs these private narratives to craft a work of universal relevance. (Oct. 7) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

China is in the midst of history's largest human migration, a hundred and thirty million of its citizens having left their home villages in search of urban employment. Chang, an American of Chinese descent, explores the migrant experience and the burden of being Chinese through the lives of several young women in the industrial city of Dongguan. Their Sisyphean attempts at self-reinvention are both entertaining and poignant; the most ambitious of them achieves modest success selling dubious health products, before falling under the spell of an American raw-food guru. In her diary, she reminds herself, "We can be ordinary but we must not be vulgar." Chang's fine prose and her keen sense of detail more than compensate for the occasional digression, and her book is an intimate portrait of a strange and hidden landscape, a universe of relentless motion. Copyright ©2008 Click here to subscribe to The New Yorker --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is a mixed work. It starts off interestingly enough by profiling the factory girls, the factories and

two or three in particular whose lives are very interesting. By bringing in the authors on family ties to China, we gain a much clearer understanding of her. And her family's background, but the work should've been considerably edited down and shortened. It was meticulously researched, and very well written. But I couldn't finish it.

Book describes several young Chinese, namely migrants who work in various factories out-of home and the book deals with various positive or negative aspects of their lives, such as their values, saving money, expectations, dreams, problems with employers, parents, colleagues, boyfriends, etc. Personally, this book is interesting and important for me, because provides excellent account of so-called "Oral History." Author did not use indirect information, but she knew Chinese so that she met Chinese girls face-to-face and talked with them many hours; in other words, she used very authentic account. I am sure that this kind of view of problem(s) is also legitimate part of History (together with Official History which contains statistical dates, facts, numbers, names, percentages, etc). So that the book does not contain statistical information, political analyses or economical facts, it is focused on tangible persons and real situation around them. Author (Leslie T. Chang, in Chinese as 張炎憲) in mentioned book did not judge girls and others, she only described lives and situations, so that information are presented in really friendly tone. On the other hand, readers could estimate situations in Chinese Factories and particularly we can estimate Chinese Generation of Young Adults. I should underline that our understanding of China and Chinese is important because China is superpower (with several point of views: economical superpower, political superpower, military superpower, there are huge mass of migrants in Europe and America, etc). Undoubtedly, our understanding to China & Chinese is important, because China & Chinese hold and will hold very significant role in World History. As a reader and non-professional sinologist, I can declare that Chinese Girls and Boys have unfortunately pragmatic and utilitarian orientation (money, career), have ambivalent liaison to tradition (some of them accept tradition, some of the try reformulate tradition, some of the reject tradition), and I detected disintegration of traditional values. Well, what is my final opinion? It is pleasure from me to give Five stars and this advice: If you want to understand contemporary Chinese and estimate forthcoming Chinese (especially lower strata ones), you ought to read mentioned book!

First things first. Everyone is entitled to their own opinion, but when certain ignorant customer reviewers make frivolous off-the-cuff comments like the book is "boring" or "the chapters don't flow easily," when that is decidedly not the case, I must state right off that this marvelous and well-written

book is one of the best introductions to Chinese society I have read. Late in the book there is a disturbing account of a small-scale business operation in an apartment in Dongguan, Guangdong Province. The male running it keeps his female underlings working all day and forbids them to leave the apartment except for a few hours once a week; they sleep in a cramped dormitory-style bedroom. Quiz: this operation is A) a brothel, B) a sweatshop, C) a religious cult, D) none of the above. D is correct: it's a private English language school for adults, mainly female factory workers between jobs who want to gain English credentials. Their teacher's notion of language learning is, like so much in China, quantitative-based and modeled on the factory assembly line: a machine he invented rapidly rotate words which the students must memorize as they flash by. This episode in Leslie Chang's book is representative in presenting two aspects of life in China for the hundreds of millions of migrant workers trying to achieve career stability or success in the city. On the one hand, there is the optimistic assessment, emphasized by Chang throughout the book, namely the freedom migrants now have to leave the village and go where opportunity beckons, with increasing numbers of success stories, primarily for female migrants, who often paradoxically enjoy greater freedom than males due to the obligations of male migrants to return to the village and care for their family. As Chang recounts with the stories of two migrants she befriended and followed for two years, Min and Chunming, the choices young Chinese women from the countryside now have at their disposal for upward mobility can be compared to the freedom and allure of worldwide travel young people from the developed world enjoy. On the other hand, there is a powerful counterforce holding many Chinese back from freedom and autonomy: the imposing psychological control of group conformity. As a longtime American resident in China, I see this all the time in numerous guises among all social strata, not just migrants (and I write about this in my website attached to my profile). Although it is true that working conditions in factories have been improving over the past few years as workers learn about their rights and bargaining power through better communication (the internet) as well as negative publicity about labor exploitation at Foxconn, this still largely applies to skilled factory workers. For countless other workers in the service industry (restaurants, shop workers, the sex industry), working conditions remain awful - 12-14 hour days, 1-2 days off per month, minimum wage. Educated white-collar workers, for their part, experience a different kind of exploitation, hardly less grim: typically just as long working hours (though varying considerably from company to company) or 24-hour cellphone monitoring when off work, with elaborate penalty systems for failure to respond immediately to cellphone summons or other minor infractions (one highly educated female I know who worked as a journalist for a national newspaper quit because they were docking too much of her pay each month for largely unspecified penalties). So returning to

the aforementioned English training school, where Chang would describe the conditions experienced by these women as a matter of personal freedom and choice, we also recoil at the psychological coercion involved, which prevents them from rebelling, protesting and leaving. To be sure, this school is a bizarre exception, and most English schools in China, even unaccredited ones, are run like normal schools, with students present only during class hours. But another book needs to be written that deals with the dark side of China's economic success, even in these upwardly mobile times. It's good to have Chang's upbeat account, but for every migrant who achieves success like Min, how many millions of Chinese (including the educated class) remain locked and paralyzed in their internal cages of fear and anger, quietly spending their entire waking hours making superiors rich while they receive a pittance (not to mention the horrifying ongoing problem of companies that don't pay their workers at all, even an entire year's promised wages, folding up operations just before the Spring Festival and disappearing). After years of teaching in Chinese universities, I could see the mental slavery all around me on university campuses, which unlike universities almost anywhere in the world, are completely void of any signs of student protests. Largely enabling and ensuring China's economic expansion, in short, is group coercion and internalized fear on a scale few other societies know.

This book is excellent. Other reviewers have done an excellent job of summarizing this book, and I concur with the positive reviews already posted. For me personally, this book was especially fascinating because it satisfied many of the questions I have had about factory life in Dongguan. I have visited Dongguan twice, and have been to nearly all the major landmarks (South China Mall, the now completed IMAX theater and Teletubbies playland, the history museum, the public Library, Songshan Lake etc) which the author mentions in her book. I find her descriptions reflect the impressions that I had of these places and the people who inhabit them. Though I have a close friend who is a government official in Department of Commerce in Dongguan, I have no friends who are factory workers. Thus I have been endlessly curious about who these factory workers are and what their lives are like. Thank you Leslie Chang for providing us with a window into that world. I am eagerly awaiting your next book.

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