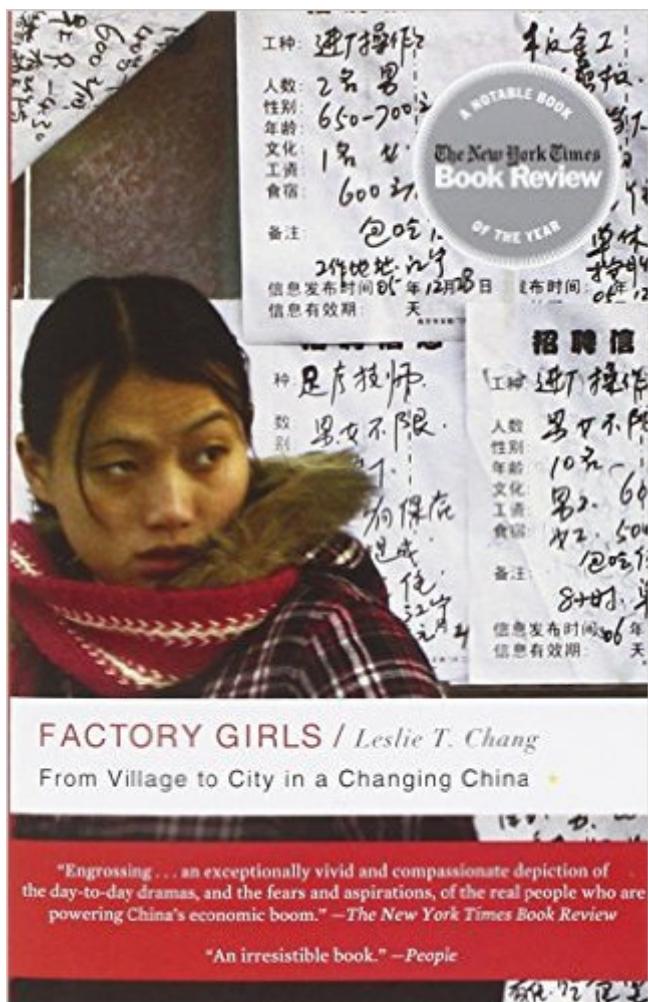


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Factory Girls: From Village To City In A Changing China



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

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Customer Reviews

In this book, Leslie Chang delves deeply into the world of migrant workers to find out who these people are and what their collective dislocation means for China. Chang skillfully sketches migrants as individuals with their own small victories and bitter tragedies, and she captures the surprising dynamics of this enormous but ill-understood subculture. In many ways, migrant workers embody the fundamental changes underway in China today. Chang covered China for the *Wall Street Journal*, and she's an insightful interpreter of a society in flux. People who leave village life, with its intense cocoon of family and community ties, find themselves untethered in a city, scrounging for work and a place to sleep. "They were prey to all sorts of cons, making life decisions on the barest bits of information," she writes. And yet many migrants also feel freed from a suffocating web of traditional habits and mores. Able to explore and grow in the lawless free-for-all of China's boomtowns, many cross an invisible line into the modern world, and there is no going back. Chang got to know dozens of young women who have ventured to Dongguan, a new metropolis just north of Hong Kong. She focuses on two particularly compelling ones, Min and Chunming, who gradually came to trust her enough to share their stories, as well as diary entries, late-night phone calls and heart-to-heart confessions. Each is ambitious, impulsive, endearing. Each left home as a teenager and experienced a big adventure. Through their lives, Chang shows us how unmoored China is, erratically yearning for something better, and surprisingly resilient.

From this book's opening paragraph positing two factory girls meeting each other with an opening question of, "What year are you," the China-knowledgeable reader knows with certainty that author Leslie Chang has her literary finger firmly on the pulse of mainland China. The good news is that Ms. Chang sustains her dead-on rendition of Chinese culture and factory life throughout the full length of this deeply engaging look at China's massive migrant work force. *FACTORY GIRLS* is informative and insightful, offering a first-hand view of the (mostly) young women who make up what the Chinese aptly call the "liudong renkou," the "floating population." Ms. Chang, a former *Wall Street Journal* correspondent and spouse of China author Peter Hessler (*RIVER TOWN* and *ORACLE BONES*), directs her attentions to the industrial heart of southeastern China, in the city of Dongguan. There she meets and obtains the confidence of several young women from peasant families who have migrated from small villages in the country's interior, agricultural provinces to take factory jobs. There's Lu Qingmin, a migrant from Hubei Province who follows her older sister

Guimin's trek to the factory world in Guangdong Province, near Hong Kong. There's Wu Chunming, the inveterate diarist and self-motivator, a native of Hunan Province who left her village for factory life in 1993, long before the migration became a massive movement. Amazingly, as Chang reveals, some of the young women had no idea what factory work was like before arriving there, imagining it as some sort of chatty, casual environment. What they discover is, of course, far different, but Chang uses her personal entrée to explore their motivations. First and foremost is money, both for their own use and equally to send back to their families.

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