



# Factory Girls: From Village to City in a Changing China

By Leslie T. Chang

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## Factory Girls: From Village to City in a Changing China By Leslie T. Chang

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.

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

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)

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From [The New Yorker](#)

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."

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When it comes to global economics, Leslie T. Chang knows both sides of the equation well—that is, from the vastly different perspectives of East and West. Her readable, compelling account of human migration in *Factory Girls* will open many eyes, particularly in her in-depth profiles of young women who face nearly intolerable working conditions and ruthless competition ("People who are too honest in this society will lose out," the instructor of a turnkey school told Chang) as they struggle to make their way. Chang's own ancestors are on the periphery, and the author ably recounts her family's varied, tragic past in the context of a story whose ripples will surely have global repercussions in the coming years. The only complaint? Chang's own family story is worthy of its own book.

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