

Cara Wallis, **Technomobility in China: Young Migrant Women and Mobile Phones**, New York: New York University Press, 2013, 263 pp., \$45 (hardcover).

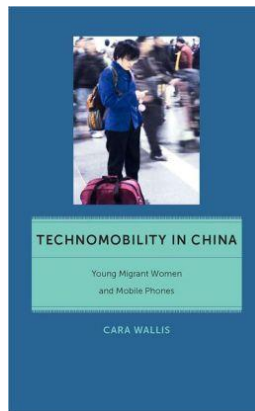
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Cara Wallis' **Technomobility in China: Young Migrant Women and Mobile Phones** is one of the first studies to examine the use of mobile phones by a specific group. Wallis targets the relationship between young rural-to-urban women and their mobile phone use to show how mobile phones empower "immobile mobility" (p. 6). Paradoxically, mobile phones tie these women to certain places and jobs, but they also help them broaden their horizons and pursue "modern" selves.

The research builds on interviews with and observations of young female migrants in Beijing. Wallis begins with a discussion on the migration in the post-Mao era. China's outside world and implementing reform development, including the "diffusion of urban life" (p. 26). At the same time, opportunities and the establishment of John Knight and Lina Song (1998) as Great Wall which divides rural and substantial differences in their levels of migrant workers at a disadvantage in situations. As the gap in living people continues to widen, greater ensues as migrants search for a better restricted by the long working hours in the jobs available to them. Under these circumstances, mobile phones help them to see and experience the world.



reasons for mobile urban-rural experience with opening up to the policies promotes many aspects of new media technologies in everyday however, unequal development a *hukou* policy (p. 20)—defined by "an institutionally imposed invisible urban people and generates economic welfare" (p. 38)—puts social, cultural, and economical standards between rural and urban migration to Beijing and other cities life. Sadly, their opportunities are

Mobile phone ownership is important for young migrant women, Wallis points out, because a mobile phone is more than a material or technological object; it also symbolizes migrants' desire for modernity and ways to achieve self-shaping. Young female migrants try to improve their self-development and *suzhi* (p. 133)—one's self-awareness, knowledge, worth, and demeanor. They want a mobile phone, but also want to know how to use it because doing so shows the "skills, knowledge and etiquette needed" to be modern (p. 89).

Chapter 3 examines how young migrant women practice their immobile mobility by enriching their *guanxi*—one's social networking based on an individual's social connections—particularly in China, with mobile phones. Mobile phones help them save time that would otherwise be used to schedule phone calls and minimizes their reliance on public phones. This helps them maintain their *guanxi* with friends and

families and makes it easier for them to date. Although they are restricted by work, they can begin to surmount barriers of space, place, and time to enrich their relationships and pursue self-development.

Chapter 4 focuses on the relationship between immobile mobility and the usage of camera phones among rural-to-urban migrant women. Building on theories of imaging and photography, Wallis finds that the use of camera phones allows young migrant women to represent the world in their own way. They use cameras to explore the limitations of their living circumstances as well as to plan and imagine brighter futures.

Next, the author examines the relationship between immobile mobility and labor policies to discover whether using mobile phones could improve the economic status of migrants. She finds that the use of mobile phones provides "more control to bosses" (p. 175) and does not help female workers find better jobs or lead better lives. They remain immobile with their mobile phones.

Unlike previous research on mobile phone use in China that focused on technological implications, Wallis concentrates on "social aspects" of mobile phone use (p. 178) and combines the technology and social constructions of gender-, age-, class-, and place-based identities to identify "mobile phone assemblages" (ibid.) of these young female migrants. Initially adapting an intersectional framework, the author explores the implications of mobile phone use by studying how the integration of technology and social communication leads to the co-construction of technology and subjectivity. Wallis emphasizes the importance of mobile phones within social-techno practices and argues that mobile phones enable immobile mobility for young migrant women, who come from rural areas with little knowledge, few skills, and low social status and who use mobile phones to try to establish their modern rural-urban identity to live up to the conception of modernity in contemporary China.

Technomobility in China is enlightening with regard to contemporary Chinese communications developments. Readers concerned with the real life of young migrant women will find in-depth analyses here. Due to the structural restrictions of hukou, rural-to-urban women cannot equally enjoy what urban women do, and they are determined not to dwell in the lower class of the society. Also, owing to their age—usually 16 to 25—they are treated unfairly by their bosses, are paid less, are required to work longer, and are subject to stricter disciplinary measures. Moreover, their gender hurts job prospects. They have less workforce and development opportunities than do male migrants. Wallis illustrates the gender discrimination thoroughly with a study on beauty salons, where higher technical skill jobs as "stylists" (p. 84) are reserved for male employees while female employees are allowed only to do basic jobs, such as washing and drying hair and greeting costumers.

For readers interested in the relationship between technology and people, Wallis provides new insights as she highlights the ironical relationship between mobile phones and young migrant women. Although they are considered to be a mobile population, their lives remain bounded by society. They view mobile phones as something that shows their modernity, however, their mobile phones do not reflect their real situation accurately. Wallis claims that immobile mobility is incompatible with "social mobility" (p. 27) and economic mobility. Mobile phones do help young migrant women enrich their relationship with friends and family and help them find dates using text, images, and shared songs. However, mobile phones

seldom enable them to change their social status, obtain better jobs, or improve their poor material conditions. They cannot afford even to find a new job due to their lack of both time and money. In this respect, the relationship between young female migrants and their mobile phones is unequal, given the gap between migrants' high expectation and their low achievement through mobile phones.

Wallis presents a positive image of migrant women who are eager to use their phones to explore mobility, despite their relative immobility. She suggests the concept of "necessary convergence" (p. 180), which implies that economic restrictions can coexist with the ability to take pictures and listen to music. Mobile phones allow young female migrants to experience the city they live in, imagine the world, and construct new identities they hope to inhabit in the future. To some degree, mobile phone use has liberated them from their original "undeveloped" rural life, enabled their autonomy, and given them more freedom than their mothers and grandmothers enjoyed.

Technomobility in China is well-organized and clearly written. Wallis' extensive on-the-ground observations and interactions lend her writing authenticity and readability. She explains the relationship between young migrant women and their mobile phones using numerous vivid examples and does not get lost in abstract theories. Her exploration of immobile mobility provides new insights concerning the role of the mobile phone in the migrant women's lives, as well as on the techno-social and Cultural Revolution in contemporary China. Despite narrow advances to date, Wallis hopes that mobile technology will ultimately lead to positive social changes and the cultural transformation of China.

References

- Knight, J., & Song, L. (1998). *The rural-urban divide: Economic disparities and interactions in China*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.