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4 Urbanizing Entrepreneurial Women in China

The Chinese State, Female Entrepreneurs, and Urban Redevelopment

Yujing Tan and Zhao Zhou

Introduction

Urban stories from the reform and opening-up era are stories about the loosening of land regulations and the enforcement of population control in China. From 1978 onwards, the reform and opening-up agenda sparked the massive urbanization of both the land and population. At the end of 2011, the urbanization rate of the resident population had reached 51.27%, an increase of 33.35% since the end of 1978, at an average annual increase of 1.01% (National Bureau of Statistics 2019). Today, China is experiencing new rounds of rapid urban redevelopment in both urban and rural regions. These new urbanization agendas are carried out in the name of “urban renewal” (*chengshi gengxin*, 城市更新) and “in-situ urbanization” (*jiudi chengshihua*, 就地城市化). There is no doubt that the urbanization process has affected the employment and life chances of millions of citizens in China. This series of urban renewal and the rise of urban entrepreneurialism have seen a policy shift since President Xi Jinping came to power in 2013.

Urban, socio-anthropological, and development studies have examined in detail how China’s market-oriented urbanization has resulted in the spatial and social mobility of its rural population (Chan and Hu 2003; Lee 2003). The improved life chances triggered by urbanization led to the emergence and state’s recognition of entrepreneurship (Démurger and Xu 2011; Rao 2020; Zhang 2001). However, investigations of this from a gender studies perspective are still relatively scarce, and the field of urban studies lacks a comparative perspective. Thus, in this chapter, we ask: what do the processes of in-situ urbanization in the countryside and urban renewal in cities, as a process of re-urbanization, mean for women’s mobility and life chances in the New Era under Xi’s administration? We attempt to answer this question by telling two stories of female entrepreneurship from Shenzhen and from the Rongjiang County of Guizhou Province.¹

By examining these cases of female entrepreneurship in Shenzhen and Rongjiang County, we found that female entrepreneurship is themed and branded as a new development tool by the local authorities. This chapter argues that the economic empowerment of women works hand in hand with state-led urbanization in both urban and rural China. In the new vision of urbanization, women are constantly

being shaped as subjects of urban redevelopment and the revitalization of the countryside, on the one hand, while they are reinforcing a new state-led urban developmentalism, on the other hand. In this type of developmentalism, the economic ideas of neoliberalism and the economic mobilization of women by the Leninist state are combined. Observing women's entrepreneurial activity in the urban redevelopment process allows us to think through the changing relationship between the state and women in this New Era.

We selected Shenzhen and Rongjiang County in Guizhou as cases to examine the relationship between urban redevelopment and female entrepreneurship for two main reasons. First, these two places can be considered templates for urban renewal and in-situ urbanization in China, respectively. Shenzhen is the earliest special economic zone and has been coined as the “world's factory” following China's reform and opening-up in May 1980 (Forbes 2016). In recent years, the Shenzhen government has been trying to make Shenzhen a capital of innovation and entrepreneurship through “urban renewal” construction. Guizhou, a relatively poor region economically, originally contributed a plethora of rural-to-urban migrant workers to Shenzhen and other export-oriented economies.² Guizhou's provincial government is working to promote local urbanization within the framework of national poverty alleviation by reabsorbing the outgoing labor force back into their hometowns to start businesses, revitalize the rural economy, and drive these poorer areas out of poverty. Second, during our fieldwork, we found a proliferation of female-led entrepreneurial activities in Shenzhen and Rongjiang, many of them organized under the slogans of “Her Economy” (*ta jingji*, 她经济) and “Her Power” (*ta liliang*, 她力量). We believe that it is necessary to study how and why gender is instrumentalized in policy discourse and how these women with entrepreneurial aspirations prepare to start their own businesses under the influence of various versions of this discourse, policy practices, other discourses, family situations, and local authorities.

To better understand how and why female entrepreneurship is shaped so strongly by policy opportunities, in June and July 2021 and March 2022, we conducted online in-depth interviews with seven women at different stages of entrepreneurship and with different educational and family backgrounds in Shenzhen via WeChat. Our interview questions were mainly related to the women's entrepreneurial fields, specific entrepreneurial projects, and understandings of entrepreneurial policies, and the series of entrepreneurial competitions organized by local government.

The first author of this chapter conducted fieldwork for her PhD thesis in Shenzhen between 2015 and 2017. She aimed to comprehend the ways Shenzhen has become and been branded as an “innovation city.” The thirteen-month fieldwork trip reinforced her hypothesis that the technological start-ups were dominated by male entrepreneurs. She interviewed more than sixty entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs-to-be who were actively involved in preparing for or expanding their businesses, only four of whom were female entrepreneurs. However, since mid-2016, the phrases “Her Economy” and “Her Power” have suddenly become visible in the tech-entrepreneur communities of Shenzhen.

To better understand female entrepreneurship as well as the role of the government in driving and facilitating female entrepreneurship in rural areas, we conducted an in-depth case study of typical female entrepreneurship in the indigo-dyeing sector in the Rongjiang County of Guizhou in July of 2021. In addition to the focal entrepreneur, we interviewed two other entrepreneurs in related industries and one respondent from the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) in Guizhou. The questions we were exploring were as follows: is the female entrepreneurial population starting to empower themselves in the male-dominated tech-start-up space? If so, who is driving such discourse and creating female entrepreneurial activity? Is it the female entrepreneurs themselves? We discovered that, indeed, the promotion of female entrepreneurship is a form of female self-empowerment, but it is also part of a national policy practice that started out as a government-led initiative and eventually became a new marketing discourse. The female entrepreneurs themselves justified this policy and marketing discourse by engaging in the entrepreneurship of the self.

This chapter is structured as follows: in the first section, through a close reading of policy documents and current academic scholarship related to the topic, we discuss the political-economic connotations of urban redevelopment in China. We then go on to examine urban renewal and in-situ urbanization, which are the two key policies of urban redevelopment in China. In the second section, we review the relation between urbanization and female entrepreneurship in China; we especially articulate how “female entrepreneurship” is themed and has been branded to empower female migrant laborers in the new policy scheme of state-led urban redevelopment. We present two case studies—from female tech-entrepreneurial activities in Shenzhen and female entrepreneurship in the indigo industry in Guizhou—to illustrate how female entrepreneurship is defined and promoted by local governments and ACWF, how the women themselves understand and experience the female-entrepreneurship-driven policy transition, and how they comprehend their new subjectivities.

Solving the Mobility Crisis in Two Modes of Urban Redevelopment: “Urban Renewal” (*chengshi gengxin*, 城市更新) and “In-Situ Urbanization” (*jiudi chengshihua*, 就地城市化)

Studies on China have shown how the country's rapid urbanization has brought about rural to urban migration, rapid industrialization, and uneven development between the coastal and interior areas. After the reform period, export-oriented factories were established in coastal areas, and a large number of rural migrant workers flooded into these industrialized cities (Ngai 2005; Ong 1991). As argued by some scholars from urban studies (Ma 2002; Zou 2021) and by authors in this volume (see Ip, Chapter 1), the policy and process of urbanization after the founding of the People's Republic of China occurred as a result of the government's vigorous development of urban-centered industrial construction. To some extent, the industrial policy was centered on the development of large-scale industries, especially heavy industries, and determined the basic pattern of China's urbanization process.

However, due to the *hukou* (household registration, 户口) system in China, most peasant migrant workers living in urban industrial zones are not able to achieve urban citizenship. A resident without *hukou* could not access urban welfare, housing, medical services, or schooling in the 1980s and 1990s. Many first-generation migrant workers enjoyed the early consumerism of the 2000s, which was imagined as a type of urban modernity (Gaetano 2005; Jacka 2006). But their spatial mobility did not fully translate into the bright future of long-term residence in cities (Lin 2011, 2013). So, what about migrant groups with peasant status? How will the young and highly skilled labor force get a foothold in large cities? A new round of urbanization policies, with the goal of maintaining social stability, has aimed to address these questions (Kochan 2016; Taylor 2015). In the last decade of the New Era, China has developed a new urbanization plan to promote socio-economic mobility, a key contributor to the legitimacy of the party state (Chu 2020). Recent research explicates the ways in which changes in the current Chinese political environment have influenced or reshaped urban renewal, arguing that the state uses market instruments, such as the real estate market, to achieve deliberate political ends (Wu, Zhang, and Liu 2022).

In the early years of reform and opening-up, China's urbanization policy was mainly aimed at promoting mobility by driving market and population movement and supporting industrialization and employment in order to further develop an urban-centered economy. Into the mid to late 1990s, urbanization policies targeted land mobility, leading to the commodification of land use rights and the domination of an industrial model in which housing developers and local governments joined forces to drive local economic development by way of land financing (Ahlers 2015; Yew 2012). Wu and his colleagues' (2022) study discusses the new urban redevelopment transition, in which the central state is gradually reclaiming the economic voice of local governments and developers regarding land; this means that urban redevelopment is no longer driven by real estate and is increasingly influenced by political considerations.

We build on Wu and his colleagues' (2022) argumentation by suggesting that current urbanization policies ("urban renewal," "in-situ urbanization") also reflect a return to the state's goal of increasing mobility—for mobility reinforces the legitimacy of the state. The State Council issued the "National New Urbanization Plan (2014–20)" in 2014 to promote comprehensive urban redevelopment with "people at the core" in urban and rural areas. China's urbanization-centered spatial planning slogans and policies are shifting from promoting investment to a focus on achieving social stability through social mobility.

For the state, the new political proposition of promoting social mobility through urbanization is being realized in two main ways. The first is through further updating urban industries, with the images of the urban being centered on previous urban planning. By transforming urban villages and old factory districts into centers of innovation and entrepreneurship through large-scale urban renewal and old-city renovation (*jiugai*, 旧改) projects, cities are transforming and rebranding themselves from industrial to post-industrial and, importantly, innovative. While many cities' previous redevelopment projects have demonstrated a complex

tension between local governments, developers, residents, and the central state's intentions, the urban renewal project has been more or less successful at constructing the images of several innovative powerhouses in China today. The case of Shenzhen, to be discussed in this chapter, takes place in the context of one such dramatic shift in spatial image.

The second way the state is promoting social mobility through urbanization is by implementing in-situ urbanization in the countryside. According to the definition in the policy text, in-situ urbanization refers to a new model of urbanization in which the population does not migrate to cities or other places on a large scale, but rather relies on the town system within the county to promote the scientific and rational gathering of industries, resources, people, and information and to realize the integration of social security for residents, including the equalization of basic public services for both urbanites and rural-urban migrants (Zhu 2017). This model of urbanization is also tied to the central government's "rural revitalization" and "poverty alleviation" objectives, which have been promoted in recent years. On this basis, local employment and entrepreneurial activities are seen as a means of promoting rural revitalization and the urbanization of residents (Li 2014). We will address the Jinxiu Plan (锦绣计划) in Guizhou to illustrate how these central government policy goals are partly acted upon by local governments in female-oriented entrepreneurial practices.

From the perspective of policy utility, the main objectives of these two types of spatial policy are to promote the industrial transformation of cities and rural rejuvenation. However, what needs to be pointed out is the political economy at the heart of these objectives. These two seemingly simultaneous but separate social transformations in rural and urban spaces reflect the state's management of citizens' mobility; urban residents become the subjects of "innovative" industries, fulfilling the goal of urban redevelopment: innovation and entrepreneurship. Rural residents are encouraged to start their own businesses and work in their own villages, or to return to their hometowns, to fulfill the policy objectives of "poverty alleviation" and "rural revitalization." At this point, as Wu et al. (2022) argue, the state's goals in urbanization have shifted to non-economic growth-related objectives. We further argue that individuals, rather than economic organizations such as housing developers, are the targets of development and governance in the new wave of urbanization. It should be noted here that this shift in the policy agenda does not mean that new policy practices will eliminate inequality, but rather that the neoliberal entrepreneurship promoted by the state is combined with the state's management of mobility. The goal of the new policy is to mobilize individuals with an entrepreneurial spirit to rediscover markets and entrepreneurial goals in the face of great expectations of mobility, in an attempt to solve the accumulated female unemployment problems and distributional inequalities.

In the case studies section of this chapter, we attend to women's entrepreneurship in Shenzhen and Rongjiang to analyze the ways local governments mobilize female entrepreneurs in the context of urban renewal policies, and the ways in which entrepreneurs respond to policy mobilization and negotiate their entrepreneurial activities in the process of policy negotiation. Focusing on women's agency

in entrepreneurship in the context of China's New Era contributes to the analysis of women's entrepreneurial activities in development research.

Female Entrepreneurship and China's Innovation-Driven Urban Redevelopment: Tracing Policy Transition

Since the 1980s, "innovation," as a strong discourse in Reagan-Thatcherism, has entered the discussion on urban redevelopment. Projects such as "reinventing Boston" (Mieg 2012), the "Regeneration of Hoxton in London" (Pratt 2009), and the recent urban innovation project in New York after the COVID-19 pandemic (Zukin 2021) have witnessed governments' urban policy shift from promoting state-led urban planning to encouraging a market-led urban redevelopment regime that is reconfigured by multiple stakeholders to boost the innovation economy. Innovation and entrepreneurship are recognized as urban redevelopment engines by urban planners. Criticism on this Schumpeterian urban and industrial transition focuses on (1) the rise of financialization in which short-term investment-driven projects are stimulated (Weber 2002) and (2) the uneven urban economic restructuring and inequal division of labor that are shaped by neoliberal urban and social policies in the trend of urban redevelopment (Golubchikov, Badyina, and Makhrova 2014). But most of the studies on innovation-driven urban redevelopment are conducted in developed economies, and much academic attention has been paid to male-dominated tech-innovation activities in those late-capitalist urban projects. There is still relatively rare research focusing on the relation between innovation-driven urban redevelopment and female entrepreneurship in the developing world.

A growing number of scholars from development studies have introduced a gender studies perspective and discussed the impact of urbanization on female entrepreneurship (Hasan 2020; Vinze 1987). However, current research examining the relationship between the present wave of urban renewal, in-situ urbanization, and innovative entrepreneurship in China lacks case studies on this topic (Hu 2015; Rui 2018). Examining the relationship between female entrepreneurship and the current process of urban redevelopment and in-situ urbanization in China should be of great interest to researchers in development and entrepreneurship studies.

Indeed, the policy discourse around entrepreneurship and urban redevelopment is itself gender biased. We see a number of keywords in the policy texts that emphasize "female entrepreneurship," but not "male entrepreneurship." Is it that "men" have disappeared? Or does the state see "women" as a governable target in policy practice? We discuss these critical questions in our case study, and we highlight the responses of female entrepreneurs to the topic of the gender card in policy practices.

Fieldwork by development studies scholars in developing countries has provided academics with an important framework for studying the relationship between urbanization and female entrepreneurship (Gergely 2013; Noritake 2009; Steel 2017). Urbanization provides more opportunities for female entrepreneurship. Neo-classical opportunity cost theory is central to explaining this idea (Hasan 2020). Urbanization has undoubtedly provided women previously bound to the rural system

of social relations with more opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship (Gergely 2013). Urban centers offer better education, training, and financial facilities than rural areas. In addition, cities are centers of employment opportunities because of economies of scale and agglomeration, and they provide the necessary market linkages for enterprise development. Development studies scholars also argue that because developing countries were predominantly rural societies for so long, it was only after independence that a rapid process of industrialization led to urbanization (Rabb and Rotberg 2014). This process has created a gap between the rich and the poor, and gender factors have further exacerbated the impoverishment of women who are already economically disadvantaged. To promote women's empowerment, scholars of development studies have been actively advocating for governments, particularly in post-industrialized countries, to improve their welfare policies for women and promote women's employment and entrepreneurship (Atasoy 2014).

It is true that the Chinese government is concerned about women's welfare, especially as it relates to female poverty. Since the reform and opening-up in 1978, a combination of development research and international aid projects has persuaded the Chinese government to introduce a series of policies to alleviate rural women's poverty. However, we argue that, in contrast to the approaches of development research, the Chinese government's promotion of female entrepreneurship is not merely about women's welfare and poverty alleviation, but also about mobilizing women to achieve further industrial upgrading and innovation in rural and urban areas; this is especially true in the current wave of urban redevelopment that is driving post-industrialization and characterized by an innovation-driven economy.

In the previous section, we showed the ways changes in China's urbanization policies are closely related to changes in the state's mode of governing mobility. In 2009, with the further reform of the financial system, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, and the People's Bank of China, instigated by the Women's Federation, issued a joint policy to improve microfinance. The objectives of the Chinese state's policies on women's employment and entrepreneurship have gradually been aligned with its goals of industrial change and urban transformation.³ After 2010, these policies targeting women's welfare were furthered to cover female entrepreneurship and expand female employment in urban areas. The social policies regarding female entrepreneurship have been embedded in the industrial policy system concerning urban development and industrial upgrading, which we term an industrialization of social policy. In this policy framework, social policies have given way to industrial and urban redevelopment policies, and welfare objectives for women have given way to goals for industrial upgrading and urban economic development. Moreover, social policy has become a catalyst for industrial policy. We have found that while the issue of promoting female entrepreneurship has been present in Chinese social policy discourse since the mid-2000s, the key phrase "female entrepreneurship" has been repeatedly emphasized in the context of recent urbanization policies and the industrial policy of "mass entrepreneurship and innovation." Since 2014, the Chinese government has sought to promote industrial transformation with the slogan and policy objective of "mass entrepreneurship and innovation" (ACWF 2021).⁴

In a sense, female poverty can be reduced by promoting innovation and entrepreneurship for individuals. We argue that female entrepreneurship is a state-led social project that combines female individuals with urban redevelopment related to industrial and social policies. Female individuals, economies that can contribute to urbanization, and new industrial development (e.g., internet companies) are mobilized in this social engineering project. It also should be noted here that local governments' promotion of the "female entrepreneurship" agenda is driven by recruitment pressures. In 2021, "promoting female entrepreneurship" was propagandized by the central government as a target for local government performance assessment (State Council 2021). This means that there is pressure on local governments to specifically promote female entrepreneurship. The challenge is how to organize and guide this entrepreneurship. The roles of the ACWF and local business organizations are essential to the success of such campaigns. This process will be illustrated and discussed in the case study section to answer the question: how have local social organizations that support female entrepreneurship been able to bring women together in line with the objectives of local urbanization, the promotion of innovative cities, and the revitalization of rural economies?

In the next section, we focus on the impact of industrial and social policies related to urban redevelopment and female entrepreneurship on the entrepreneurial activities of rural and urban women in China today. We empirically examine and discuss how these policies have immediate ramifications regarding women's access to resources to relieve poverty, and willingness to start businesses. By exploring the relationship between policy change and female entrepreneurship, we analyze how the state reshapes its relationship with female subjects, and how women strategically use policies to expand their social relations, financial resources, and markets, while negotiating with local authorities in their specific entrepreneurial activities.

Entrepreneurship of Female Subjects: Women, the State, and the Urban Planning of Female Entrepreneurship in Shenzhen

Entrepreneurship of the self is about making the self the goal of the business. In his discussions on neoliberalism, Michel Foucault argues that neoliberalism manufactures subjects as "entrepreneurs of themselves" (2004, 232). Adopting the Foucauldian concept of the "entrepreneurial self," we consider entrepreneurship of the self in female entrepreneurship to be a process through which female entrepreneurs or entrepreneurs-to-be try to define and use the feminine identity to do business. However, in the social context of China, rather than criticizing this identity politics as essentializing femininity, we aspire to analyze this behavior of female entrepreneurs in relation to the changes in social and industrial policies associated with the state's promotion of urbanization. The neoliberal subjectivation in this sense is not the proclamation of business maximization, but the state-led social engineering of female entrepreneurship in the urban redevelopment agenda. In this section, we briefly introduce how the ethics of "Her Economy" and "Her Power"

are embedded in the social and spatial constructions of industrial upgrading in Shenzhen. We then examine how female entrepreneurship has been branded as a self-empowering force by the local state and appropriated as a marketization force by female entrepreneurs themselves.

Shaping the “Her Economy” through Local Governments’ Spatial and Industrial Reform

Since the mid-2010s, in concert with industrial upgrading, urban renewal (城市更新) has become an urban redevelopment strategy for local government in Shenzhen. In general, Shenzhen’s urban renewal involves the transformation of manufacturing areas that were once underdeveloped and abandoned. The most salient results have come from urban planning that aims to transform these manufacturing areas into innovation hubs, and an innovation-driven industrial policy was launched that targeted young professional migrants rather than peasant migrant workers in Shenzhen. These drastic social and economic transformations have been well-documented by various scholars (Li, Han, and Wu 2019; O’Donnell and Bach 2021). Especially in the context of Shenzhen, the rhetoric of policy discourse around urban transformation shows how the state thinks about individual mobility and industrial innovation (Wang and Tan 2020).

First, the policy highlights the importance of industrial segmentation in the process of industrial transformation. So, how does the policy affect the creation of “Her Economy”? In fact, the policy itself has no gender preference. What it does affect are the preferences of the investment and financing community in Shenzhen in terms of entrepreneurial goals. The result of this transformation is that “Her Economy” has become a keyword that easily attracts investment in innovation and entrepreneurship. An investor we spoke to explained that entrepreneurship is inseparable from investment, and the biggest crisis for investment is not finding an investment proposition.⁵

Second, the policy highlights the subjectivity of individuals in building an innovative entrepreneurial city, importing the neoliberal notion of relying on individual efforts for economic development. The aim was to shape a new kind of citizen subject: migrant workers capable of innovation and entrepreneurship in Shenzhen.⁶ The state, at the time, was rationalized into the role of a servant. An interviewee working in the Science and Technology Bureau explained: “Instead of directly subsidizing start-ups with cash, the government now provides better and more precise services to entrepreneurial subjects through social services. Supporting women’s entrepreneurship is a manifestation of this precise service.”⁷ The implication of this statement is that the government views and rationalizes its policy investment in entrepreneurship as a social service. The government continues to influence change in the entrepreneurial ecosystem by providing refined social services, rather than supporting entrepreneurs administratively. At the organizational level, social associations, foundations, and, most importantly, the ACWF have played important roles in organizing and mobilizing women’s entrepreneurial activities in the past decades.⁸

The Organization of Female Entrepreneurs: Crafting a Market-Driven Community in the Local Welfare System

Since 2016, supporting female entrepreneurship has become a niche organizational proposition in Shenzhen's NGO circle.⁹ Under this new proposition, new associations have also started to emerge.¹⁰ We take as examples the associations and foundations that serve women in support of their entrepreneurship and the series of innovative entrepreneurship competitions specifically for women that have emerged in Shenzhen. In May 2016, the Shenzhen Female Entrepreneurship Association was established under the promotion of the Shenzhen Women's Federation. From the official publicity, we can see this occurred in the context of the policy of mass entrepreneurship and innovation (Chinanews.com 2016). In October 2016, the Shenzhen Project Care Foundation set up a care fund specifically for female entrepreneurship. The purpose of the fund is to provide systematic and comprehensive entrepreneurial skills training for women, conduct research on female entrepreneurial industries in society, and provide venture funding for female entrepreneurship (Shenzhen Project Care Foundation 2017). With the goal of providing social benefits for female entrepreneurs, these associations and foundations also host certain competitions to mobilize entrepreneurship. The next two sections focus on the motivations and concrete practices of these organizations to examine their forms of support for female entrepreneurship.

We initially found that these charitable organizations supporting female entrepreneurship are not only concerned with entrepreneurial activities but also with women's physical and mental preparation for entrepreneurship, especially women who are relatively disadvantaged in their socio-economic status. For example, during the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020, the Female Entrepreneurs Association organized a series of "Essential Health Classes for Women" to promote awareness and concern about breast and cervical cancers among female entrepreneurs, and to guide women to engage in entrepreneurship with a good mindset and a healthy body. This is related to the "two cancers" prevention and treatment work advocated by the Women's Federation in Shenzhen in recent years; since 2017, the Women's Federation has pushed the municipal government to provide free screening for cervical and breast cancers. The Shenzhen Project Care Foundation's Care Fund for Female Entrepreneurship was eventually used to conduct research on women's entrepreneurial risks and provide start-up funding for women's businesses. From November 2017 to December 2020, the Foundation assisted entrepreneurs who had become mothers, especially single mothers, in launching their businesses and secured exposure for them on television. It also conducted various workshops to guide mothers in employment and entrepreneurship and to rebuild the self-confidence of single mothers.

These social associations not only support female entrepreneurship for social welfare purposes, they also shape the training activities and social networks they organize into commercial opportunities. For example, the mandate of the Shenzhen Female Entrepreneurship Association, which emphasizes female entrepreneurship in the technology sector, highlights the importance of social platforms and

new technology-mediated resources for female entrepreneurial activities—a focus linked to the fact that the association’s president is the CEO of a cloud-based storage company. By turning female entrepreneurs into registered users, the association forms a strong network of community organizations and provides a stable user base for the companies associated with the association.

Last but not least, we found that these social organizations endeavor to mobilize female entrepreneurship and drive entrepreneurial spirit by organizing entrepreneurship competitions. These female-focused competitions are very recent affairs in comparison to other entrepreneurship competitions that do not use gender as a selection principle. However, they share some of the same characteristics as other entrepreneurship competitions. The aim of these female entrepreneurship competitions is to select female entrepreneurial talent using an intense competition format and a refined market-based selection mechanism invented by venture capitalists (Sohu 2018).¹¹ On April 27, 2021, the final of the first Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau-Greater Bay Area Star of Female Innovation and Entrepreneurship Competition was held in the Futian District of Shenzhen. The competition attracted entrepreneurial projects from more than 200 women, and after several rounds of judging by a panel of investors and staff from local industrial parks, thirteen projects made it to the final round. Zhang Huifen, Secretary of the Party Branch and President of the Shenzhen Women Entrepreneurship Promotion Association, delivered a speech:

In the old days, there was Mulan in the army, who joined the army on behalf of her father to protect her family and country. The purpose of this competition is to integrate the elements of innovation and entrepreneurship, use the market mechanism, gather various innovative resources, absorb the strength of all social parties including venture capital institutions, build an investment and financing service platform for innovative and entrepreneurial teams and enterprises, and promote the development of women’s innovation and entrepreneurship.

(china.com 2021)

The weaponized statements of local officials, full of mobilizing concepts and stories, are mainly attempts to rationalize female entrepreneurship and to treat women’s high-risk entrepreneurial activities as a war. Among other things, the state, as the main policymaker, also plays the role of a service provider when women join high-risk entrepreneurial activities. The promotion of competition fits the norm of the Leninist Party’s reward system. It should be noted that, here, the Leninist state’s discourse around mobilizing individuals to fulfill national development goals is combined with a neoliberal emphasis on the dynamic nature of individual economic behavior.

Creating Entrepreneurship of the Self

Although female entrepreneurs from different social classes and educational backgrounds have very different practices and understandings of how they can use

available policy resources and mobilize social connections, we found them to be more interested in how entrepreneurship policy can be practically applied to their entrepreneurial activities than in the social and macroeconomic purposes of the policy. As part of social policy, entrepreneurship policy is a system of state support and care for female entrepreneurs. However, we found that the women have pragmatic attitudes toward the policy. They believe that “if there is policy support, they should actively apply for it, but it does not matter if there is not” or that “since others have applied for policy support, I should apply for it too, so that I will not be left behind in terms of access to this resource.”¹² Female entrepreneurs themselves also sometimes perpetuate female stereotypes when working in certain industries, such as mother and child products, beauty technology, and clothing design. Of course, more and more women with advanced degrees in STEM disciplines are entering the entrepreneurial space, and start-up competitions and venture capital funds are favoring female entrepreneurs in information technology and high-end service industries.

In addition, these women bring their own understandings of entrepreneurship to the table when they talk about their entrepreneurial activities. For these female entrepreneurs, the purpose of entrepreneurship is not just to make money. Or rather, they focus on the meaning of entrepreneurship in their lives while starting a business for financial gain. Dai, a thirty-six-year-old mother and entrepreneur with an MBA and a master’s degree in industrial design, explained the “personal value” of female entrepreneurship:

Women entrepreneurs choose to start their own businesses as a product of industrialization and urbanization. The industrial society has improved the status and economic income of women, who now derive their economic resources from their husbands as well as from their own work. While men and women have also welcomed equal opportunities in work and entrepreneurship, the cost of entrepreneurship is different for men and women. Even with entrepreneurship, women still have to juggle family responsibilities of having children and caring for the elderly. We feel from these multiple roles that we have to have a lot of personal strength to start a business.¹³

From this narrative, we can see that female entrepreneurs from the middle class and above are trying to ease their plight by creating a discourse of personal initiative, as trying to prove themselves in a working environment that is not actually equal for men and women, and in a household environment that comes with personal responsibilities, is not easy. Here, we argue that this discourse emphasizing individual initiative both echoes the state’s transformation into a supporter of entrepreneurial activities in certain industries and reproduces the discourse of “gender equality.” This statist policy discourse highlights the social good of female entrepreneurship in the new economy but camouflages the fact that women experience more precarity in the job market. This makes it possible to discuss the relationship between agency and structure in the context of female entrepreneurial activity. Female entrepreneurs do strategically use policy benefits to empower themselves and use policy discourse to market themselves, but these strategies, however, do not shake the

state's preconceptions about women's entrepreneurial activity: women are still the ones being helped with this policy mobilization.

Poverty Alleviation through Rural Renewal: In-Situ Urbanization and Female Entrepreneurship in Guizhou's Indigo Industry

The ACWF in Guizhou Province (one of the least developed provinces in the southwestern part of China) initiated the "Jinxu Plan" (锦绣计划) in 2013. The Jinxu Plan is designed to create a body of female artisans that can drive the transformation of rural industries. Rongjiang County is the first experimental site of the Jinxu Plan in Guizhou. The construction of the industrial park on which the plan is based is one of the results of the local urbanization process (Xinhua News 2021). Rongjiang County is located in the southeastern part of Guizhou Province, and more than half of its main inhabitants are people of the Miao (苗族) and Dong (侗族) ethnic groups. The blue-dyeing industry in Guizhou is a highly ethnized industry, and blue dyeing is also regarded as a cultural heritage of Dong and Miao people. However, the communist revolution largely halted the development of the blue-dye industry between the 1950s and 1970s, and it was not until the 1980s that the industry was revived, as blue-dye handicrafts were needed to meet the demands of the Japanese and European markets. It can be argued that the contemporary revival of Rongjiang's blue-dyeing industry has been embedded in the globalization of China's inland export processing industry. The rise of this industry is also the result of the great social mobility that has taken place in rural areas since the 1980s; local men have gone to work in the Pearl River Delta, while women have supported the development of the local blue-dye processing industry.

This historical context has been appropriated in the new discourse of female entrepreneurship in the blue-dyeing industry. Since the early 2010s, Guizhou has established a series of industrial parks, and the government of Rongjiang County even started to create a "return migrant workers' entrepreneurship park" in 2016 in an attempt to turn returning "farmers" into "bosses" and "craftsmen/women" and drive local economic development. In 2020, the Jinxu Plan was aligned with the objectives of "poverty alleviation" and "rural industrial vitalization," which were announced by the central government in 2016 and 2019 (Xinhua News 2023). Ethnicity, gender, and entrepreneurial subjectivity do shape the intersectionality of female entrepreneurship policy issues. Rural ethnic female entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs-to-be are concerned with their multiple social identities, and these multiple social identities shape their making of female entrepreneurship within rural rejuvenation and their strategic practices toward it. However, it should be noted that we cannot essentialize ethnicity in Guizhou's entrepreneurial mobilization, and in fact it is the "women" of female entrepreneurial activity who are recognized as the subjects of policy in the eyes of local policy practitioners.

The second on-the-ground urbanizing force affecting rural ethnic female entrepreneurship is the arrival of the e-commerce network in the countryside via urbanized logistics network infrastructure. Beyond the county and provincial

levels, cross-regional e-commerce platform companies have become the ideal type to open up the distribution of goods for female entrepreneurship. After gaining access to local governments, e-commerce platforms, through their existing platform-based business networks, allow farmer entrepreneurs who start their businesses in industrial parks to register their online stores on Taobao (the Chinese version of Aliexpress), making them Taobao store owners. This act of lowering the threshold for farmers to start their businesses echoes Alibaba Group's corporate social responsibility slogan of "Internet + poverty alleviation," introduced in 2014 (Ruidong 2016). The second part of this section will discuss the relationship between e-commerce and female entrepreneurial activities as part of the local urbanization infrastructure and how female entrepreneurs perceive and strategically use e-commerce networks.

The Jinxiu Plan (锦绣计划) and "Her Economy": Female Subjectivity, the State and Local Development

Research on entrepreneurship suggests that new businesses typically suffer from the liabilities of smallness (Aldrich and Auster 1986) and newness (Stinchcombe 1965). The liability of smallness describes the reality that entrepreneurs only have a limited amount of resources and are likely to be constrained in their abilities to get more. The liability of newness refers to how it is challenging for entrepreneurs to build effective business networks because new ventures typically have low levels of legitimacy (Freeman, Carroll, and Hanan 1983). Both the liability of newness and the liability of smallness increase the risk of failure. The literature on new, female-led ventures suggests that, in addition to the factors associated with human capital (e.g., experience and training) and personality (e.g., risk-taking tendency) (Fairlie and Robb 2009), the challenges that women face in the entrepreneurship process are particularly focused on access to resources (including information, financing, and network building) compared with new ventures more generally (Poggesi, Mari, and De Vita 2016). In the context of rural areas, we can imagine that the perceived social roles of women make new, female-led ventures even more vulnerable.

However, this literature on how female entrepreneurs choose and sustain entrepreneurial activity is not so much about the social motivations for their entrepreneurship. We argue that a discussion of women's entrepreneurial activity must first focus on how their individual life chances shape their entrepreneurial motivations. One female entrepreneur that we interviewed, Miss Yang, was in her early thirties and from the Dong ethnic minority group, which has a strong tradition of indigo dyeing.¹⁴ Before starting her business in the indigo industry in her home village in 2016, she attended university in Guiyang, the capital city of Guizhou Province, between 2004 and 2008. After graduating, she worked for the public primary school system and later in a private education institution for eight years. Unlike other rural young people who are lured by the work and education provided by China's growing cities, Miss Yang quit her job in Guiyang, the capital city of Guizhou, and returned to her home village.

Miss Yang explained several considerations that led her to choose to return to her hometown and start her own business. As she described,

There are three reasons that drove me to come back. First of all, the life in the city is not as beautiful as imagined. The job opportunities are limited in the big cities. Although I have been living in the city with my husband for eight years, still I didn't see the future; the second, the weaving and dyeing of indigo textiles is part of the Dong minority group. This tradition has been passed down over generations for hundreds of years. When I was a child, I was sitting by my grandma and listening to the sound of the loom when she was weaving the cloth during the night. Nowadays the industrial cloth has substituted our traditional cloth in many ways. The younger generations are leaving our village to go to fast-growing regions in China for job opportunities. And I can see that our culture is vanishing. I hope I could do something to save the indigo tradition. The third one is the left-behind children (*liushou ertong*, 留守儿童), which has become a huge social problem. I hope I can provide job opportunities for the females who remain in the village, and even attract more females to come back, instead of going out and leaving their kids in the village to live with their grandparents.¹⁵

From her narrative, we can see that Yang's anxiety about her career in the city and her desire to rebuild a smoothly operating rural social system were the immediate motivations for her to return to her hometown and start her own business. As a university-educated woman from the Dong ethnic group working in a private urban educational institution, and as a worker amidst the countless ordinary white-collar workers in the provincial capital, for Yang, returning to her hometown to start her own business was a way to promote not only her own sense of her ethnicity but also her professional and social mobility. It was the ACWF's Jinxiu Plan that finally got her off the ground. On the face of it, without support from the ACWF in Guizhou, Yang could not have overcome the challenges of establishing, running, and later growing her workshop (which later became a female craftsmanship cooperative). In her establishment phase, with help from the Jinxiu Plan, Yang got an interest-free loan of 260,000 RMB and was provided with a fast-track service from the local government to get her new business registration completed. It is important to note here that the Jinxiu Plan is a rough guideline rather than a directive policy framework, and was introduced to allow entrepreneurs to compete for limited policy resources by coming up with innovative ideas.

For social entrepreneurs like Yang, promoting the commercialization of rural craft industries and boosting rural women's employment are sound reasons to access policy support. This plan was actualized by the female entrepreneurs themselves to support female labor force participation and female entrepreneurship in less developed, especially rural, areas, with a focus on ethnic embroidery, batik, and ethnic clothing and apparel. Female entrepreneurs have become important

implementers and promoters of the program at the local level. In recent years, the Jinxiu Plan has led to measures including a preferable tax policy, entrepreneurship subsidies, and vocational training. As of the end of 2020, this plan had supported more than 500,000 women and 1,354 female-led firms and rural professional cooperatives; it had also established more than 1,000 poverty alleviation workshops for craftsmanship training (Xinhua News 2023).

Yang had also received policy funding support in the form of training workshops for female craftspeople on blue-dyeing techniques. Although her workshop was set up, the legitimacy and business networking issues remained. Yang's profile had not helped her address these entrepreneurship issues directly, but labels such as "well-educated" and "returning home entrepreneur" had the potential to make her one of the prominent representatives of "Her Economy" in Rongjiang County, and even in Guizhou Province. Because of this, soon after her establishment of the business, the ACWF in Guizhou guided Yang in receiving many orders from the fashion industries in France and Italy via the ACWF's connections. These orders not only brought in cash but also served as important triggers for international market growth. According to Yang, the revenue from the international market made up 90% of her total sales by the end of 2019.¹⁶

In addition to these direct forms of support, we also found that the Jinxiu Plan had played an important role in facilitating network building for Yang's business. First of all, the exhibitions, competitions, and vocational training organized by the plan had become social networking events, gathering female entrepreneurs and other women with embroidery and batik skills. Yang was thus woven into the local ethnic embroidery, batik, and ethnic clothing and apparel business network. During our visit, Yang shared with us that she was in frequent contact with other entrepreneurs in Rongjiang County to discuss issues related to the indigo industry. By doing so, she hoped to form "alliances" with those rural female workers and avoid destructive competition. Second, in line with the objective of creating opportunities for women who remain in their villages to work closer to home, the promoters of the Jinxiu Plan, such as the Women's Federation, had also co-organized a large number of poverty alleviation workshops all over Rongjiang County with Yang, through which the women who stayed at home could in turn become supplementary labor or employers for scaled ventures like Yang's workshop (see Figures 4.1 and 4.2).

In addition, through Yang's case, we can see how the anxieties of individual women are being addressed by the Women's Federation to unleash the power of female entrepreneurship in the process of local urbanization. We found that the driving force behind Yang's entrepreneurship was a combination of female subjectivity, cultural entrepreneurship, and the state's view of rural development: women's individualization process and senses of subjectivity are highly aligned with the patriotic discourse of personal development and building one's hometown. This patriotic and neoliberal discourse was the driving force behind Yang's efforts to uphold her traditional culture and create economic vitality for her local community.



Figure 4.1 Women's handicraft workshops in Rongjiang County. Photo by Zhao Zhou, July 22, 2021.

Empowerment of Female Entrepreneurship via Digital Infrastructure

In illustrating Yang's decision to become an entrepreneur and the success of her business, we cannot ignore the empowering effects of digital technology in rural areas. The argument that the development of information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure and digital platforms helps alleviate poverty by mitigating the entry cost of entrepreneurship and promoting social-economic development is generally accepted (Avgerou 2010; Yu and Cui 2019).

Many studies now argue that rural e-commerce can help entrepreneurs solve problems within their businesses, but there is a limit to what can be solved in terms of the system as a whole. The development of an ecology of e-commerce infrastructure has made it difficult for small stores to have a chance at success. But many female entrepreneurs have moved beyond the traditional use of e-commerce networks as simply tools to expand their sales. We found that Yang's workshop followed the typical labor-intensive business model of running an indigo workshop for the most part. It covered the complete indigo-colored cloth production process from weaving, to dyeing, to fashioning traditional Dong cotton garments. The revenue came from selling naturally dyed indigo textiles, as well as indigo fabric home decor. In addition to serving the local market, Yang also sold her products via e-commerce platforms such as Taobao. This typical business model seems flexible but is hard to scale to meet the



Figure 4.2 A workstation set up jointly by the ACWF and the local government. It has been named the Women's Home of Rongjiang and is the official address of the Jinxiu Plan in Rongjiang, and is also recognized by the ACWF as a Children's Home. Photo by Zhao Zhou, July 22, 2021.

goal of creating job opportunities for women remaining in their village to work closer to home. As Yang described, industrial cloth production and fast fashion have largely decreased local demands for these traditional products in the past decades. The internet helps in reaching further markets, but the sales are quite limited.

In Yang's case, the ICT infrastructure and digital platforms did not help in expanding her social network, but they did help in sustaining that network and in streamlining the management of her dispersed manufacturing network in the local area. Yang managed the production network via WeChat.¹⁷ As she described,

the orders are not stable, and therefore the way we organize the production is different from the industrial manufacturers. Our workshop weaves the sample with patterns and different designs. We basically outsource the production to women who live in different villages. We share the sample via the WeChat group (one of the most popular social media applications). Also, we use the group function to show and compare the work done by different people. By doing so, these women can also learn from each other.

But beyond this, what we found was that Yang's choice and use of the e-commerce infrastructure were strategic.

First, Yang had not relied entirely on e-commerce platforms to sell her products. Yang did not see the e-commerce platform as a mere sales platform, but rather as a channel that could be used strategically to empower her entrepreneurial activities and compensate for deficits in her current business. The products she sold on the Taobao platform accounted for less than 1% of her total sales. Her workshop-cooperative mainly produced products that she sold to large overseas companies. For her, Taobao was only a platform for her to showcase her niche handicrafts from Guizhou online, rather than a sales platform. This shows the dilemma of industrializing handicraft goods: on the one hand, the handicraft industry is highly localized and individualized, and on the other hand, it is labor intensive, making it very difficult to create a market. To solve this dilemma, Yang had taken the bespoke route and semi-scaled her blue-dyed products: they tried to cut out the weaving process and thus received large amounts of cloth and a large number of cotton t-shirts from customizers in Jiangsu and Zhejiang, and from overseas; they then printed, dyed, and embroidered them in their workshops, and then returned the products to the customizers. In fact, e-commerce is a complementary sales channel. These handicraft entrepreneurs in Guizhou have the flexibility to choose and swap between e-commerce channels and offline sales channels.

Additionally, Yang had used multiple platforms and promoted the e-commerce platform economy. In April 2021, through the mediation of the Guizhou Development and Reform Commission and Guizhou Women's Federation, Yang and ByteDance, an IT giant that owns short video platforms such as Douyin and TikTok, launched an online charity support program called "Genius Mom" on Douyin. The project is dedicated to promoting handicraft entrepreneurship training for rural mothers nationwide. This project was also initiated on Tencent Public Welfare at the same time. As of February 2022, the project had raised 129,656 RMB through the network, out of which 99,524 RMB was used to support the operation of a straw weaving workshop in Jilin Province. Yang has tried to turn the platform's online resources into a kind of capital dedicated to community public service, raising funds for village mothers to start their own businesses. There is no doubt that Yang's venture has also relied on this e-commerce platform-enabled opportunity for public outreach across the region. For individual entrepreneurs, increased social exposure equates to increased social capital. We discern that such social capital can be easily transformed into economic benefits in the e-commerce platform economy.

Conclusion

This chapter has drawn on two case studies to illustrate how female entrepreneurship in contemporary China has become a new policy proposition in the context of urban redevelopment and has been put into practice by different individuals and economic institutions. We argue that the state has attempted to shape the framework of industrial policy and financial support for female entrepreneurship through short- and long-term plans for urbanization projects. The aim of this central state policy initiative is to promote the social mobility of urban and rural women and to maintain social stability in a macroeconomic context of economic slowdown and

employment instability in the New Era. This policy transition reflects not only the government's intention to shift responsibility for social well-being from the government to individual citizens via promoting female entrepreneurialism but also the governmental initiative to regain legitimacy around urban redevelopment.

The state's assumption is that women's social mobility is achieved by turning them into entrepreneurs amidst the new wave of urbanization and industrial upgrading. Local governments and social organizations associated with women's empowerment seek to use female entrepreneurship as a theme to leverage local social and industrial policy practices, providing financial support for women's entrepreneurial initiatives and bringing in external economic forces (such as infrastructure development for internet businesses), with the aim of transforming the overall local industrial structure. For the majority of female individuals, going into business is not only a choice mobilized by the policy but also a strategic use of policy to empower themselves. They manage their entrepreneurial organizations using the infrastructural tools provided by social organizations and internet companies. In addition, we have discerned that women's entrepreneurial aims are mostly tinged with social welfare objectives; some intend to bring more women together in entrepreneurship, and some aim to facilitate the entry of the female workforce into traditionally male-dominated fields such as science, technology, and innovation. These entrepreneurial goals are rationalized by female entrepreneurs as promoting the independence and development of the female population. However, in reality, men still make up the majority of the entrepreneurial population, and entrepreneurial activity only accelerates women's entry into the flexible workforce.

There are three main points we wish to emphasize here. First, the state's social policy approach to women's development has changed in line with its urbanization policy and industrial policy in the New Era. For the central government, female entrepreneurship is a means of promoting women's social mobility. The Chinese government is attempting to reform China's manufacturing-based urban economies and shift from a focus on "Made in China" to "Innovation in China" (Lindtner 2020; Ngai 2020). The policy of "promoting women's entrepreneurship" is attached to the industrial policy framework of "mass entrepreneurship, mass innovation" and aims to turn women with entrepreneurial potential into mainstays of innovation.

Second, the Chinese government has stimulated the growth of self-employment and private enterprise, hoping that these informal economic forces will compensate for the lack of incentives in the state economy that lie at the core of the formal economy, and will use private entrepreneurial activity to complete industrial innovation (Chen and Naughton 2017). China's informal economy is predominantly in the private sector (Huang 2019). Informal employment has been called the sponge of employment absorption and has become an important way to solve the employment problem in China's economic development. More than half of the labor force in the informal economy, which is full of precarious employment, is female. Female entrepreneurship is seen as the new market force that will activate China's urban economy. We can therefore see that female entrepreneurship is a result of the statist economic mobilization of the female workforce and that it reinforces the informalization of that workforce.

Finally, we cannot ignore the role of local governments in promoting female entrepreneurship. Local governments that promote female entrepreneurship use the issue of female empowerment to implement and balance the economic and social goals of urbanization set by the central government. The roles of government agencies in the implementation of female entrepreneurship in urbanization policies are diverse. For local governments, it is a balancing act between economic development targets and the promotion of a welfare system. Local governments embed the issue of female entrepreneurship with a social welfare dimension into their local context, always in the interest of local development. The policy measures taken to promote female entrepreneurship vary from one local government to another, depending on the local economic and social structures in place.

This is the reason why we have examined female entrepreneurial activities in Shenzhen and Rongjiang as case studies in this chapter. The mobilization of these activities in both locations reflects the activism of local governments and other state institutions in terms of supporting and encouraging female entrepreneurship. However, in contrast to that of the economically developed city of Shenzhen, the promotion of female entrepreneurship in Rongjiang is more integrated with the policy objectives of poverty alleviation and investment attraction to drive local economic development. Thus, we emphasize that the study of institutional and social constructions of female entrepreneurship cannot ignore the geographical characteristics involved in China's unequal political and economic development.

Notes

- 1 During the fieldwork in Guizhou, this study was supported by Mr. Meng Haoqi from the Insurance Institute of Guizhou, China.
- 2 According to the data from Shenzhen Natural Resources and Planning Bureau, Guizhou is the eighth ranked migrant-contributing province in Shenzhen. See "Where Do Foreigners in Shenzhen Come From?" (2021).
- 3 The Chinese government has implemented a policy of financial subsidies for small, secured loans to encourage women's employment and entrepreneurship, with a total of 383.77 billion RMB disbursed nationwide from 2009 to 2018, and 40.86 billion RMB in financial subsidies implemented by the central and local government, with 6.569 million women receiving loans. Please see the white paper "Equal Development and Sharing: The Development and Progress of Women's Causes in the 70 Years of New China" (State Council Information Office 2019) and the 2015 report "China's Progress on Women's Causes Over 70 Years" from *China Daily*.
- 4 See the full text of the "Program for the Development of Chinese Women (2021–30)" (ACWF 2021).
- 5 Online interview, February 15, 2022.
- 6 According to a report from *Gov.cn*, Shenzhen's professional and technical skilled personnel reached 38% of the resident population (Feng 2017). According to Shenzhen's seventh census bulletin, the city's year-end resident population in 2018 was 13,026,600, an increase of 498,300 over the end of the previous year. Among them, the resident household population was 4,547,700, an increase of 4.6%, accounting for 34.9% of the resident population; the permanent non-resident population was 8,479,700, an increase of 3.6%, accounting for 65.1% of the population (Hongheiku.com 2022).
- 7 Online interview, February 19, 2022.

- 8 The ACWF is a people's organization established with the goal of uniting women of all ethnic groups in China; see ACWF (2023).
- 9 According to the first author's participant observations during fieldwork, NGOs that support entrepreneurship have emerged in large numbers in Shenzhen since 2015. The institutional reason for this emergence is that local governments are outsourcing services to social organizations. It is in this way that social organizations have become the hands of governance for local governments. Organizations targeting women's entrepreneurship account for a small percentage of these innovative organizations.
- 10 See the 2018 report from the local official media outlet *dutenews.com*: "'Her Power' Is Unlimited! 14 Institutions Support Women's Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Shenzhen."
- 11 Shenzhen set up the first guide fund for women's entrepreneurship in 2018. The guide fund is a local government investment fund used to encourage other investors to invest in specialized projects (see *sohu.com* 2018).
- 12 Online interview, February 21, 2022.
- 13 Online interview, March 4, 2022.
- 14 Dong blue dyeing is a good illustration of "ethnicity" and how it is embedded in a single industry. For a historical study of Dong blue dyeing, see Liu et al. (2014).
- 15 Interview in Rongjiang County, Guizhou, July 21, 2021.
- 16 Interview in Rongjiang County, Guizhou, July 21, 2021.
- 17 WeChat is a social and e-commerce application developed by Tencent Group, one of the three largest companies on the internet in China.

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