

**Title:**

**Internal Migration, Crime, and Punishment in Contemporary China: Migrant women and their involvement in criminality**

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**Abstract:**

China's economic reforms – or its 'turn towards neoliberalism' – began in the late 1970s, fuelled a trend of urbanization and mass migration within the country, largely from rural regions to more economically developed urban areas. Women are part of the internal migration process among thousands of migrant labourers. With this exodus of 'peasant workers' from villages to towns and cities, came new challenges in a rapidly changing society. In metropolises and wider urban settings, rural migrants – men and women – are marginalised, and marginalisation makes individuals vulnerable and prone to lawbreaking. Female migrant workers, in particular, are under enormous pressure in the polarised and gendered social conditions. In migration studies in relation to China, much has been done to explore women's experiences in the rural-to-urban migration: their opportunities, struggles and hopes in cities where they live as outsiders. In socio-legal and criminological research, past studies focusing on China have looked at the overall causes of migrant criminality, drug problems among migrant youths, victimisation of 'peasant labourers', and inadequacy in public policy in response to the criminogenic, structural factors in migrant offending. Nonetheless, little attention has been paid to the subjective experience of migrant offenders, and women's involvement in lawbreaking is largely neglected. In this mini lecture, I will examine criminality involving female migrants in the context of a neoliberal society. I will use a case study to explore, from a feminist perspective, internal migrant women's engagement in illegal pyramid selling, which is increasingly prevalent among female lawbreakers in China today. I will briefly introduce the pertinent local socioeconomic setting before detailing the case study to discuss women's entry into illegal pyramid selling, their motivations, the roles they play in the criminal operation and, of course, their gains and losses as a result of participation in crime. This is hoped to help reveal links between female criminality, neoliberal subjectivities, self-enhancement, greed – neoliberalism's maladies – social exclusion and gender biases that female rural migrants experience in the new, urban milieus to which they do not belong and have no formal and real membership.