WHY DON’T THEY COMPLAIN? THE SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF CHINESE MIGRANT WORKERS’ GRIEVANCE BEHAVIORS

DUANYI YANG*

Using survey data from China, the author examines how migrant workers respond to violations of labor law in their workplaces. The central puzzle is why, given apparent widespread violations, some workers choose not to pursue remedies. Findings show that only 25% of surveyed workers who experience labor law violations interpret their experiences as labor rights violations. The author argues that the social nature of the employment relationship explains some of this gap: Although workers who share local identities with their employers are more likely to work without employment contracts, they are significantly less likely to interpret these conditions as a violation of their labor rights and interests. This article extends the research on grievance behavior by drawing on research from the sociology of law and immigration to understand how these subjective interpretative processes and social identities outside of the workplace influence grievance behaviors.

The transformation of China’s economy from one dominated by state control to that of a mixture of private and state-owned enterprises has been accompanied by increased labor conflict. Between 1995 and 2007, the number of labor disputes accepted by labor dispute arbitration committees (LDACs)—state labor agencies at the municipal and district levels—
increased by an average of 25% annually (Gallagher, Giles, Park, and Wang 2015). However, the disputes accepted by LDAC are only the “tip of the iceberg” in regard to the number of labor law violations. This study examines the apparent labor law violations experienced by migrant workers who have rural household registration but have moved to cities for permanent or seasonal non-agricultural employment (hereafter referred to as migrant workers) and the grievance behaviors of this vulnerable population.

Migrant workers make up a large proportion of China’s workforce, and most work under conditions that violate its labor law. In 2015, there were approximately 277 million migrant workers, consisting of more than a third of the entire workforce of approximately 770 million in China (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS] of the People’s Republic of China 2016). Several indicators suggest that violations of labor law are particularly widespread among migrants. For example, NBS data show that more than 50% of these workers did not have a labor contract in every year between 2009 and 2016, in violation of China’s Labor Contract Law. Around 85% of migrant workers worked more than 44 hours per week, but few were covered by mandatory social insurance (Table 1). Thus, if all those who experienced labor law violations were to pursue their legal rights, the number of arbitration cases would likely be much higher.

Given the apparent widespread violations, why do some migrant workers choose not to pursue remedies? Existing studies have largely focused on the formal institutional constraints faced by these workers. Among these are the authoritarian state regime (Lee and Zhang 2013), the limited efficacy of government-controlled labor unions (Friedman and Lee 2010), and the suppression of labor nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) (Fu 2017), which could educate workers on their rights and grievance options. Less attention has been paid, however, to the influence of informal social rules on workers’ perceptions of workplace problems. This article begins by analyzing worker grievances based on their subjective views. It illustrates how the mainstream industrial relations literature on grievance behavior can be extended to incorporate insights from the sociology of law regarding

### Table 1. National Statistics on Labor Standards of Chinese Migrant Workers (%)

|                        | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 |
|------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Contract coverage      | 42.8 | 42   | 43.8 | 43.9 | 41.3 | 38   | 36.2 | 35.1 |
| Overtime (> 44 hours/week) | 9.8  | 7.6  | 9.5  | 13.9 | 14.3 | 15.7 | 16.7 |      |      |
| Pension insurance coverage | 24.1 | 21.8 | 24.1 | 23.6 | 24   | 28.5 | 26.2 |      |      |
| Work injury insurance coverage | 13.1 | 12.2 | 14.3 | 16.7 | 16.9 | 17.6 | 17.6 |      |      |
| Medical insurance coverage | 3.7  | 3.9  | 4.9  | 8    | 8.4  | 9.1  | 10.5 |      |      |
| Maternity insurance coverage | 2    | 2    | 2.9  | 5.6  | 6.1  | 6.6  | 7.8  |      |      |

*Source: National Bureau of Statistics of the People’s Republic of China (NBS 2010, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017).
perceptions of workplace injustice and to consider the social identities that migrant workers bring to their work roles.

Using data from a survey of approximately 4,000 migrant workers, this analysis found that despite widespread labor law violations, only 25% of those who experienced such violations interpreted their experiences as labor rights and interest violations. This lack of response is attributable in part to the social nature of the employment relationship: When employers and migrant workers are from the same place of origin before migration, workers are more likely to work without a contract. For people who experienced violations, those who have a shared local network with their employers are significantly less likely to acknowledge these violations. These results reveal the importance of subjective interpretative processes in the study of grievance behavior, and the effects of workers’ social relationships and identities outside of work on their responses to workplace problems.

Existing Theories of Employee Grievances

One central question in the grievance procedure literature asks, under what conditions do employees choose to file grievances? Numerous studies have proposed theories to address this question, all of which focus on factors arising from within or directly related to workplace relationships. The canonical exit, voice, and loyalty model by Albert Hirschman (1970) predicted that employees who are more loyal will opt to stay and voice discontent when they experience it. Freeman and Medoff (1984) applied Hirschman’s model and found that unionism reduces turnover and permanent separations and raises job tenure by providing voice options as alternatives to exit.

While the exit, voice, and loyalty model indicates that voice action is associated with improved performance, some studies have revealed negative employee outcomes after grievance filing and settlement. Applying organizational punishment and industrial discipline theory, Lewin (1987) found that grievance filers experienced lower performance ratings and lower promotion rates and higher turnover rates compared to non-filers in non-union organizations. Lewin and his colleagues uncovered similar results in unionized organizations. This finding suggests that loyal employees usually suffer in silence; management retaliation is a major obstacle to employee grievance filing (Boroff and Lewin 1997; Lewin and Peterson 1999).

Motivated by efficiency wage theory in economics, Cappelli and Chauvin (1991) applied an individual rational choice model to examine how labor market factors that determine the availability of alternative jobs affect employees’ grievance filing. They found that the pay premium and area unemployment rate were positively correlated with workers’ use of grievance procedures when the cost of using alternative methods (such as shirking or absenteeism) to resolve problems increased. Bacharach and Bamberger (2004) extended Cappelli and Chauvin’s framework by investigating the moderating effect of power dependence. They discovered that
under the condition of high labor power, the wage premium was positively associated with grievance filing, as predicted by Cappelli and Chauvin (1991). Under the condition of low labor power, however (such as that experienced by Chinese migrant workers), the relationship was largely weakened or reversed.

Other studies of employee grievances have retained this rational cost-effectiveness framework but introduced procedural justice into the grievance model (Lind and Tyler 1988). Employees’ positive perception of the speed and fairness of the grievance procedure has shown to increase their use of the grievance system. The focus of these studies is usually on how the interactions between employees’ individual characteristics (such as gender, educational level, self-esteem, and competence) and the effectiveness of the system affect filings and turnover (Morrison 2011; Klaas, Olson-Buchanan, and Ward 2012).

This industrial relations research tradition has been fruitful in identifying the roles that employer behavior, law, power, rational choice, and formal institutions play in the filing of grievances. But the tradition has largely ignored the potential role of social relationships outside of the workplace and has not attended directly to workers’ subjective evaluation of their experiences at work. This gap is particularly problematic in the context of migrant workers in China, who have limited access to information about urban labor markets but carry with them deep regional ties with others from the same (broadly defined) native place when they migrate to cities.

Social Determinants of Grievances

Normative Regulation and Informal Control in Local Networks

The first question this research addresses is whether the shared local identities between workers and employers influence workers’ experience of or exposure to Labor Contract Law violations. A well-developed body of sociology research has explored the role of informal local networks but has yet to be applied to the study of workers’ grievance behaviors. Normative regulations and informal social control maintain social order (Durkheim [1893] 2014; Scott 2001), in part by publicly monitoring individuals’ behavior and administering informal sanctions that might harm their reputation (Galanter 1974).

Research on US immigrant workers has shown that identification with others in the same ethnic enclave or community facilitates an informal economy, and that group norms and informal social control also reduce opportunistic behaviors within enclaves. For example, Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993) illustrated the role of collective identity in the presence of informal loan operations in the Dominican immigrant community of New York City. Within this community, money is made available for start-ups with little or no paperwork. Neighborhood residents ostracize entrepreneurs who fail to repay their loans and so formal processes are not needed.
A similar situation may be playing out among migrants in China, where migration based on place of origin is a well-known phenomenon. Broader than kinship networks, which are usually seen as strong informal social institutions (Greif and Tabellini 2010), local networks develop based on common customs, spoken languages, and social identity. Often, migrants’ workplaces are owned by people from the same place of origin. Through local networks, employers hire farmers from their hometown or migrant workers from the same place of origin who are already in the city (Pun and Lu 2010; Swider 2015). Enclaves are thus built upon these ties. Seeking out fellow relatives, provincials, or nationals for employment is an obvious and effective survival strategy used by Chinese migrant workers as well as many other immigrant workers (Sanders and Nee 1987; Perry 1993; Lee 1998).

Thus, these local enclaves in China may function as substitutes for formal institutions designed to deal with workplace problems. In Fei’s book *From the Soil* (1992), he identifies Chinese society as “a society in which the consideration of order, not law, predominates; and in this context, order means each person must uphold the moral obligations of his or her network ties. Otherwise, the entire social system collapses” (p. 24). Although Chinese economic and political systems have significantly changed since Fei originally published his book in 1947, this classic work prompts an investigation of whether the informal social control in these networks affects the implementation of labor law in China today. The power that governs migrant workers’ actions and their interpretation of their situation may come less from a top-down authority or the law than from a bottom-up social contract and informal controls in local enclaves.

The first place this effect is likely to be seen is whether migrant workers with local network ties to employers are less likely to pursue their right to have a written contract, as required by Labor Contract Law. Because the firm policies related to labor contracts are made by employers, I expect that migrant workers with these shared local ties are less likely to expect or enforce this specific right. Although a central element of Chinese labor law today, a contract may be viewed as unnecessary or inconsistent with informal controls within the community.

**H1:** All else being equal, migrant workers from the same local network as their employer are more likely to work without a contract.

**Bringing “Naming” to the Grievance Model: Shared Local Identity and Workers’ Subjective Evaluation of Violations**

The second question to be addressed is whether workers in fact view work conditions that officially violate the relevant labor law as violations of their rights and interests. In general, the standard grievance literature fails to distinguish between workers who have and have not recognized unfair treatment at work; the few exceptions include Olson-Buchanan and Boswell (2008), who introduced a sense-making perspective to the grievance model. In other
words, the literature largely focuses on the grievance procedure structure and neglects the role played by worker subjectivity and agency—that is, the way in which workers interpret problems experienced at work. Empirically, previous studies have explained the variation of grievance filing with regard to either all employees or only those who perceived themselves to have experienced unfair treatment (Boroff and Lewin 1997). The interpretation of grievances, however, is usually neglected.

This gap in the grievance procedure literature can be filled by theories from the sociology of law, in which a “dispute pyramid” metaphor is used to model the dispute transformation process of “naming, blaming, and claiming” (Felstiner, Abel, and Sarat 1980; Albiston, Edelman, and Milligan 2014). This literature recognizes that many workers face problematic conditions but that only some of them (moving up the pyramid) recognize an injury, blame the other party for their wrongdoing, and seek legal remedy. This theory is the basis of the idea that lawsuits and other legal proceedings represent “the tip of the iceberg” in capturing problematic and officially illegal experiences.

Although the law provides individuals with a powerful set of interpretative tools in naming an action as wrong, ordinary people do not simply interpret the law as official texts that embody formal legal rules and institutions (Ewick and Silbey 1998). Rather, workers hold normative perspectives of what constitutes acceptable managerial ethics. Their interpretations are influenced by the norms embedded in their social groups, such as the kinship network, religious groups, voluntary associations, and local enclaves (Felstiner 1974; Ellickson 1991). When workers experience apparent violations, those who share an identity with their employers or supervisors may be less likely to name such violations as a problem to be remedied.

Another branch of research influenced by the labor process tradition suggests that workers may not name labor law violations as an infringement of their rights because of the hegemonic power in shared local networks. Workers may feel—and be expected to express—gratitude to those in their network who hire or introduce them into the workplace. In recent years, labor process theories have been extended to worker subjectivity and identity (Alvesson and Willmott 2002; Thompson and O’Doherty 2011). Shared local identity between employers and workers as well as between supervisors and workers may create “relation-based hegemony,” which not only generates trust and loyalty but also creates consent and diminishes workers’ dissatisfaction. Workers feel morally pressured to not acknowledge their legal rights when they work for employers or supervisors from their local networks (Shen 2007; Cai and Jia 2009). In a detailed case study of a Hong Kong factory in which kinship ties were extensively used in recruitment, Smart and Smart (1993) found that workers who became obligated through asymmetrical reciprocity were required to work beyond the official requirements of their job description. Extending this finding, the current analysis hypothesizes that people with a local tie to their employer or supervisor
may be less likely to name labor law violations as a violation of their rights and interests, since doing so would challenge the social expectation of gratitude and compliance.

**H2a:** All else being equal, among those who experienced labor law violations, migrant workers who are from the same local network as their employers are less likely to name labor law violations as violations of their rights and interests.

**H2b:** All else being equal, among those who experienced labor law violations, migrant workers who are from the same local network as their supervisors are less likely to name labor law violations as violations of their rights and interests.

**Embedded Loyalty and Solidarity: When Discontent Turns into Action**

At the stage of claiming or taking action, the exit, voice, and loyalty model (Hirschman 1970) is useful to explain the behavior of workers who have already perceived violations. To protect the public reputation of employers or supervisors from the same home location, workers may be more loyal—willing to spend extra energy on voicing their opinions through organizational grievance channels than to bring their case to governmental agencies or courts or to simply quit. Much of the early work in the sociology of law literature examined the likelihood that individuals would use the formal legal system rather than alternative means of dispute resolution. Researchers have suggested that those who share social networks are more likely to use non-legal channels, rather than the courts, to resolve disputes (Nader and Todd 1978). Additionally, among workers who have named violations, those with a shared local network may be more likely to have solvable problems that they believe can and perhaps will be addressed by management. Therefore, I expect that people who share a local network with their employers or supervisors are more likely to use organizational grievance channels to redress their grievances.

**H3a:** All else being equal, among people who named labor law violations, migrant workers from the same local network as their employers are more likely to use internal grievance channels.

**H3b:** All else being equal, among people who named labor law violations, migrant workers from the same local network as their supervisors are more likely to use internal grievance channels.

Workers’ social relationships with their coworkers may also facilitate their use of grievance channels. Resource mobilization theory (Zald and McCarthy 1979) suggests that coworkers’ shared local networks are crucial resources that provide important information about legal rights and grievances. Moreover, social identity theory predicts that workers’ perception of negative group status motivates activities to improve their group status through mobilizations (Tajfel and Turner 1986; Polletta and Jasper 2001). Thus, workers’ local enclaves may create bounded solidarity that promotes
both individual grievance filing and collective actions (Klandermans, Van der Toorn, and Van Stekelenburg 2008; Becker 2012).

This analysis cannot test whether informal local ties can facilitate the use of external dispute resolution options, such as taking the employer to court, or collective actions, such as strikes, because these cases are extremely rare. Instead, the focus is on investigating whether social relationships among workers outside of the workplace increase the probability of recognizing law violations and predict greater use of organizational grievance channels.

H4a: All else being equal, among those who experienced labor law violations, migrant workers with greater local peer network density at workplaces are more likely to name labor law violations as violations of their rights and interests.

H4b: All else being equal, among those who named labor violations, workers with greater local peer network density at workplaces are more likely to use internal grievance channels.

Data and Measurements

Data

To test the hypotheses, primary data were gathered from a survey of approximately 4,000 migrant workers in nine cities in the Pearl River Delta (PRD) and 10 cities in the Yangzi River Delta (YRD). PRD and YRD are the top two mega-regions of China, hosting 43% (109 million) of the country’s migrant workers (NBS 2012). The survey was conducted in July and August 2010 by the Center for Social Survey at Sun Yat-Sen University.¹

Because a sampling frame (i.e., a list of all members in the population) does not exist for this highly mobile population, the survey uses nonprobability sampling. The nonprobability survey purposively selects respondents to obtain the desired sample composition while data are being collected. This process was achieved through quotas, for which the researchers pre-specified a particular distribution across location, gender, and industry based on census data.² First, the 19 cities were given quotas based on their estimated share of migrant workers. Second, within each city, quotas were established by gender and industry, again based on census data. Third, the survey imposed a maximum of one worker from firms with less than 30 employees, three workers from firms with 30 to 299 employees, and five

¹The nine cities in PRD include Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Foshan, Zhaoqing, Dongguan, Huizhou, Zhongshan, and Jiangmen. The 10 cities in YRD are Shanghai, Nanjing, Suzhou, Wuxi, Changzhou, Nantong, Hangzhou, Ningbo, Jiaxing, and Shaoxing. Migrant workers completed the questionnaires; undergraduate and graduate student research assistants provided assistance to less-educated workers. To prevent students from filling out the questionnaires themselves, a few attention questions were included. In addition, respondents were asked to leave their phone numbers. If the survey administrator questioned the reliability of the survey, they called the respondents to verify the validity of the survey and discarded unverified questionnaires.

²Census data information was obtained from the 2007 Shanghai Statistical Yearbook and the China 1% National Population Sample Survey 2005.
workers from firms with more than 300 employees. Multiple workers surveyed from one firm were selected to capture variation in gender, occupation, age, or place of origin.

Respondents were found on the street near factories and were screened to choose those who worked full time without urban household registration (hukou) or four-year college degrees. Although the survey did not use pure random sampling, it is the most comprehensive and representative survey available to answer the research questions on migrant workers’ experiences of and responses to labor law violations.

**Dependent Variables**

*Experiencing Violations*

The survey asked respondents about their objective employment conditions in the current firm before inquiring about their subjective evaluations of their work experiences. The study grouped experiences that would seem to violate labor law into six categories: no contract, no social insurance, overtime violations, wage violations, occupational safety and health (OSH) violations, and forced labor. The definition and coding strategy of these variables are described in Appendix Table A.1. These variables measure apparent labor law violations, without assessing whether the workers themselves acknowledge those situations as problematic or injurious.\(^3\)

*Naming and Blaming*

After the respondents reported their experiences of law violations, they were asked about their evaluation and attribution of the wrong. Naming and blaming was operationalized based on the following survey question: “Since August 2009, have you ever felt negatively (you yijian) about labor rights and interests (laodong quanyi) toward your current firm?” Naming and blaming was coded as 1 if the worker answered yes to this question, and 0 otherwise.\(^4\)

*Grievance Filing (Claiming)*

Respondents who acknowledged illegal practices (i.e., naming and blaming = 1) were asked whether they had expressed grievances to the management in

\(^3\)Although other types of violations should reflect the objective working conditions workers experienced, OSH violations should be interpreted with caution. Workers may have had different understandings about what constitutes hazardous and unprotected conditions in the workplace. Workers’ reports about OSH violations were also likely to be affected by their relationship with, and feelings about, employers and supervisors.

\(^4\)The naming and blaming rate may be overestimated for two reasons. First, the survey process may have elicited workers’ recollection of their legal rights. Second, quanyi means rights and interests, which is a broader notion than workers’ legal rights. Naming and blaming interest-related issues rather than labor law violations might inflate the rate. These two potential sources of bias, however, are likely to be independent of workers’ social relationship with their employers, supervisors, and coworkers.
the past year. Among the organizational grievance channels were 1) a suggestion box, 2) a hotline, 3) an in-house grievance office, 4) a focus group within the firm, 5) a conversation with management and/or a supervisor, 6) an attempt to arrive at a solution with the employer, 7) an enterprise labor union, and 8) an employee work council. Grievance filing was coded as a dummy variable equal to 1 if employees expressed all or part of their grievances to the management using any of these grievance channels, and 0 otherwise.

**Focal Independent Variables**

I measured the presence of a shared employer-worker local network with the following survey question: “Does your current employer come from the same province as yourself?” Employer-worker province network equaled 1 if the respondent answered yes to this question, and 0 otherwise. I constructed employer-worker city network and employer-worker village network variables based on similar questions about workers’ city and village. Results are described in the original study and are available upon request.

Supervisor-worker network is a dummy variable that equals 1 if workers are from the same province as their supervisors, and 0 otherwise. Alternative supervisor-worker city network and supervisor-worker village network analyses are available upon request.

Peer network density equals 0 if none of the coworkers are reported (by the respondent) to be from the same province as the respondent, 1 if less than 10%, 2 if 10 to 19%, 3 if 20 to 29%, 4 if 30 to 49%, and 5 if 50% or more of the coworkers are from the respondent’s province.

**Control Variables**

In the analysis I controlled for workers’ individual characteristics and their firms’ characteristics that may correlate with workers’ experience of violation and their naming and grievance filing behaviors. The definition and coding strategy of key control variables are described in Appendix Table A.2.

**Analysis**

**Descriptive Statistics**

Figure 1 shows the prevalence of labor law violations experienced by migrant workers and the gap between the laws on the books and migrant workers’ subjective evaluations of their experiences. A total of 86% of the workers in the survey had experienced one or more types of apparent labor law violations at their current firms. Yet only 22% indicated that they had felt negatively toward their employer with regard to labor rights and interests (i.e., naming and blaming = 1), and only 14% had used organizational
grievance channels. These results demonstrate the value of using the dispute pyramid to model these different stages of grievance behavior in Chinese workplaces.

Table 2 demonstrates how migrant workers’ experience with and interpretation of labor law violations vary by the type of problem they encounter and their shared social relationships with their employers and supervisors. It reports descriptive statistics for key dependent variables (experiencing violations, naming and blaming, and claiming) by workers’ shared provincial local network with their employers and supervisors.

Table 2 shows that in the full sample, social insurance had the highest rate of violation (68.5%), followed by overtime (36.6%), lack of contract (31.4%), wage violations (18.6%), forced labor (18.8%), and OSH violations (15.5%). The high rate of social insurance law violations appeared to be tied to the structure of the pension system. Employers contribute 20% of a worker’s wage to the regional social pool under the Pay-as-You-Go system, and workers contribute 8% of their own wage to the personal pool under the Funded System. After 15 years or more, workers receive pensions from both systems. Pensions are not managed as a national integrated system but instead through regional pooling systems. If migrant workers move to another region or return home, only their contributions to the personal pool can be cashed out (Williamson and Deitelbaum 2005; Gao, Yang, and Li 2012). Therefore, those who do not have long-term plans to stay in a given city have strong incentives to forgo the social insurance requirement (or to ignore violations of this law). For many migrant workers, complying with social insurance legal mandates contradicts their short-term economic interests.
The high rate of hour violations also supported findings in the existing literature that migrant workers generally express an interest in working overtime. In practice, most migrant workers live under extreme economic scarcity and focus on the total amount of wages received at the end of the month, without paying attention to the laws for maximum hours (Chung 2015; Franceschini, Siu, and Chan 2016).

Concerning Hypothesis 1 (H1), the bivariate tests in Table 2 show that workers from the same province as their employer were significantly more likely to experience contract and social insurance violations ($p < 0.01$), as well as wage violations ($p < 0.05$), but less likely to experience hour, occupational health and safety, and forced labor violations ($p < 0.01$). Workers from the same province as their supervisors were also significantly more...
likely to experience contract and social insurance violations but less likely to experience forced labor.

Turning to workers’ subjective evaluations of and actions toward illegal practices, the “naming and blaming” rate is highest for those who experienced OSH violations (42.3%), followed by forced labor (36.8%), wage violations (36.5%), hour violations (28.2%), social insurance violations (24.6%), and contract violations (23.4%). Concerning Hypothesis 2a, the bivariate tests show that when they experienced violations, workers from the same province as their employers were significantly less likely to name all violations. (Alternative specifications with shared city and village ties to the employer show similar results.) However, the naming and blaming rate does not differ by shared supervisor-worker local network. Hypothesis 2b is not supported. Migrant workers were less likely to name a violation or blame the employer when they shared a local tie, but the supervisor’s home location was not associated with naming and blaming.

The bivariate test provides support for Hypothesis 3a. Among workers who “named” a problem with their employers’ labor practices, workers from the same province, city, and village (although the latter two are not shown in the table) as their employers were significantly more likely to use organizational grievance channels, including direct communication with the management, to resolve the problem. However, this bivariate test does not support Hypothesis 3b. Workers’ grievance filing rate did not differ for those who did or did not share a local network with their supervisors.

It is important to note that grievance procedures in Chinese firms, especially those that are private, are extremely weak and informal (Liu 2014). The most frequently used grievance channels were having a conversation with a supervisor (42.7%) and seeking solutions with the employer (36.65%). Migrant workers rarely used the more formal internal grievance procedures, such as turning to a labor union or an in-house grievance office (Figure 2). This finding is similar to the grievance filing pattern in the United States, where most employment relationship conflicts do not result in the filing of written grievances (Kochan, Yang, Kimball, and Kelly 2019). For example, a study of unionized grievance procedures estimated that for every one grievance settled through the formal grievance procedure, approximately 12 grievances were settled informally through discussions with peers, supervisors, and managers (Lewin and Peterson 1988).

For workers who used the internal grievance channels, the survey asked about which issues were involved; multiple answers were allowed. Figure 3 shows that among workers who used internal channels, the vast majority reported issues related to wages (74.42%). These channels were also used

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5I define formal grievance channels as turning to unions, works council, and in-house grievance offices. Other channels, such as hotlines and suggestion boxes, are counted as informal grievance channels. Because multiple answers were allowed in the grievance channel question, among workers who had used grievance channels, 81% used only informal channels, 11% used both formal and informal channels, and 7% used only formal channels.
to report issues regarding occupational safety and health (31.44%), hours (28.77%), management practices (24.33%), social insurance (12.97%), and labor contract (9.41%).

Regression Results

Table 3 includes regression results pertaining to Hypothesis 1. I estimate a logit model predicting the likelihood that workers would experience contract-related violations (M1), social insurance violations (M2), wages violations (M3), working hours violations (M4), safety and health violations (M5), and forced labor (M6).

As shown in models M1, M5, and M6, holding other variables constant, sharing a provincial local network with the employer increases the log odds of working without a contract by 0.85 (p < 0.01), and decreases the log odds of experiencing OSH and forced labor violations by 0.35 and 0.4, respectively (p < 0.05). These results offer support for Hypothesis 1. In addition, no effect emerged of a shared employer-worker network with regard to wages, hours, or social insurance violations.6

As for the control variables, female workers are less likely to experience violations regarding social insurance and OSH, whereas older workers are less likely to experience forced labor. I re-ran models M1 to M6 using Post80 as an alternative measure of age. The log odds of experiencing forced labor is 0.25 (p < 0.05) higher for workers born after 1980, but this cohort

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6H1 is supported using city and village networks as alternative independent variables. Holding other variables constant, sharing a city and village network with the employer increased the log odds of working without a contract by 0.95 and 0.92, respectively (p < 0.01).
indicator is not significantly related to experiencing contract, insurance, hour, wage, and OSH violations. Workers with higher levels of education and legal knowledge are less vulnerable to most types of violations. At the firm level, workers employed in a firm or community with a union are less likely to experience contract and social insurance violations, which suggests that the quasi-governmental unions have some administrative power to enforce those laws. Workers who were in a firm or community that had one or more civil society organizations are less likely to experience overtime and forced labor.

Compared to workers in state-owned enterprises (SOEs), those in domestic private enterprises (DPEs) are more likely to work without contracts and social insurance and to experience hours violations. Workers in foreign-owned enterprises are more likely to experience hours violations but less likely to encounter wage and labor contract violations than those employed by SOEs. Surprisingly, the latter workers were more likely to be subjected to forced labor. To further probe the problem, I ran regressions using the two subcategories of forced labor (physical abuse and deposit) as dependent variables (results are not presented in tables). Workers in SOEs are more likely to pay money deposits or have their credentials detained than to experience physical abuse. Although workers in larger firms are less vulnerable to informal employment, social insurance, and wage violations, they are more likely to experience hours violations.

To assess Hypothesis 2a, in Table 4, I estimate logit models to predict the likelihood of naming and blaming among workers who experienced any type of labor law violation (M7), as well as, specifically, contract violations (M8), social insurance violations (M9), wage violations (M10), hours violations (M11), OSH violations (M12), and forced labor (M13). Holding other variables constant, among respondents who experienced apparent violation(s), sharing a provincial local network with the employer decreases the log odds of naming (M7) by 0.45 ($p < 0.01$). This negative association
between shared employer-worker local networks and naming labor law violations holds for workers who experienced all types of violations, except hours violations and forced labor. Using city and village network as key independent variables, respectively, the analysis reveals that sharing the same city as the employer decreases the log odds of naming and blaming violations by

| Table 3. Logit Models Predicting Experiencing Labor Law Violations |
|-------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                        | M1              | M2              | M3              | M4              | M5              | M6              |
|                        | No contract     | No insurance    | Wage violation  | Overtime        | OSH             | Forced labor    |
| Province employer-worker network | 0.847***        | 0.152           | 0.174           | 0.032           | -0.352**        | -0.401**        |
|                          | (0.13)          | (0.14)          | (0.14)          | (0.12)          | (0.17)          | (0.16)          |
| Female                  | -0.014          | -0.277***       | -0.027          | -0.115          | -0.714***       | -0.148          |
|                          | (0.10)          | (0.09)          | (0.10)          | (0.09)          | (0.11)          | (0.10)          |
| Married                 | -0.139          | 0.074           | -0.267**        | -0.129          | -0.239*         | -0.150          |
|                          | (0.12)          | (0.12)          | (0.12)          | (0.10)          | (0.13)          | (0.12)          |
| Age                     | 0.005           | 0.002           | 0.000           | 0.000           | -0.009          | -0.0256***      |
|                          | (0.01)          | (0.01)          | (0.01)          | (0.01)          | (0.01)          | (0.01)          |

**Education** (ref. primary school or lower)

|                        | M1              | M2              | M3              | M4              | M5              | M6              |
|                        | No contract     | No insurance    | Wage violation  | Overtime        | OSH             | Forced labor    |
|                        | Male            | Female          | Male            | Female          | Male            | Female          |
| Middle school          | -0.129          | -0.112          | -0.151          | -0.142          | -0.035          | -0.035          |
|                        | (0.12)          | (0.14)          | (0.13)          | (0.12)          | (0.14)          | (0.14)          |
| High school or equivalent | -0.276*        | -0.628***       | -0.212          | -0.374***       | -0.184          | 0.015           |
|                        | (0.15)          | (0.15)          | (0.14)          | (0.14)          | (0.17)          | (0.16)          |
| Vocational school or higher | -0.841***      | -1.033***       | 0.392**         | -0.896***       | -0.523***       | -0.308          |
|                        | (0.20)          | (0.18)          | (0.17)          | (0.17)          | (0.24)          | (0.20)          |
| Legal knowledge        | -0.0442***      | -0.0255***      | -0.0314***      | -0.003          | -0.0364***      | -0.0280***      |
|                        | (0.01)          | (0.01)          | (0.01)          | (0.01)          | (0.01)          | (0.01)          |
| Tenure                 | -0.0576***      | -0.0429***      | -0.019          | -0.0355***      | -0.017          | 0.032***        |
|                        | (0.01)          | (0.01)          | (0.01)          | (0.01)          | (0.01)          | (0.01)          |
| Wage premium (1,000 yuan) | -0.045          | -0.014          | 0.013           | 0.038           | -0.059          | -0.112**        |
|                        | (0.04)          | (0.03)          | (0.03)          | (0.03)          | (0.04)          | (0.05)          |
| Union                  | -1.352***       | -0.444***       | 0.001           | -0.129          | 0.040           | -0.114          |
|                        | (0.18)          | (0.11)          | (0.14)          | (0.11)          | (0.15)          | (0.13)          |
| Civil society          | -0.096          | -0.176          | -0.088          | -0.402***       | -0.376          | -0.617**        |
|                        | (0.29)          | (0.18)          | (0.23)          | (0.20)          | (0.28)          | (0.26)          |
| Local worker           | 0.481*          | -0.292          | -0.021          | 0.129           | 0.303           | -0.315          |
|                        | (0.28)          | (0.25)          | (0.29)          | (0.27)          | (0.36)          | (0.30)          |

**Firm ownership** (ref. SOEs)

|                        | M1              | M2              | M3              | M4              | M5              | M6              |
|                        | No contract     | No insurance    | Wage violation  | Overtime        | OSH             | Forced labor    |
|                        | DPEs            | HMTs            | FIEs            | Firm size       |                |                |
| DPEs                   | 0.672***        | 0.380***        | 0.193           | 0.468***        | 0.009           | -0.322**        |
|                        | (0.17)          | (0.14)          | (0.16)          | (0.15)          | (0.19)          | (0.15)          |
| HMTs                   | -0.100          | 0.247           | -0.309          | 0.628***        | 0.04            | -0.410**        |
|                        | (0.24)          | (0.18)          | (0.22)          | (0.17)          | (0.23)          | (0.20)          |
| FIEs                   | -0.510*         | -0.275          | -0.576**        | 0.557***        | -0.367          | -0.477**        |
|                        | (0.31)          | (0.19)          | (0.26)          | (0.19)          | (0.27)          | (0.22)          |

**Firm size** (ref. < 100 employees)

|                        | M1              | M2              | M3              | M4              | M5              | M6              |
|                        | No contract     | No insurance    | Wage violation  | Overtime        | OSH             | Forced labor    |
| 100–299 employees      | -0.898***       | -0.471***       | 0.074           | 0.231**         | -0.056          | 0.148           |
|                        | (0.11)          | (0.12)          | (0.12)          | (0.10)          | (0.13)          | (0.12)          |
| 300–999 employees      | -1.440***       | -0.671***       | -0.246*         | 0.514***        | -0.170          | 0.524***        |
|                        | (0.13)          | (0.12)          | (0.13)          | (0.11)          | (0.15)          | (0.13)          |
| > 1,000 employees      | -2.015***       | -0.896***       | -0.419***       | 0.674***        | -0.164          | 0.203           |
|                        | (0.14)          | (0.12)          | (0.14)          | (0.11)          | (0.15)          | (0.13)          |
| Constant               | 1.773           | 1.900***        | -2.424*         | -2.179*         | -0.101          | -0.170          |
|                        | (1.18)          | (0.96)          | (1.34)          | (1.21)          | (1.24)          | (0.96)          |
| Observations           | 3,905           | 3,905           | 3,902           | 3,910           | 3,893           | 3,905           |

**Notes:** Robust standard errors in parentheses. All models control for industry, job types, province of origin dummies, and city dummies. DPEs, domestic private enterprises; FIEs, foreign-invested enterprises; HMTs, Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan firms; OSH, occupational safety and health; SOEs, state-owned enterprises.

*p < 0.10; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01.
0.8 ($p < 0.01$), and that sharing a village with the employer decreases the same odds by 0.7 ($p < 0.01$). These results are consistent with the findings presented in Table 4 for provincial ties with the employer. In contrast to Hypothesis 2b, shared supervisor-worker province, city, or village network is not significantly associated with naming and blaming.

Concerning Hypothesis 4a, workers’ local peer network density at their current workplaces is positively associated with naming and blaming among people who experienced forced labor only; it is not a significant predictor of naming and blaming when workers experienced other types of labor law violations.

Another important finding in Table 4 is that women who experienced social insurance violations and forced labor are significantly less likely to name the violations than are their male counterparts. This finding supports ethnographic evidence that the willingness to cooperate and accept mistreatment differs among women and men, and that gender identities play a central explanatory role in accounting for production politics (Lee 1998). In addition, workers who have higher levels of education are more likely to name labor violations, and having a wage premium in the current firm is negatively correlated with workers’ naming of labor law violations. When experiencing contract or wage violations, workers in communities with civil society organizations are more likely to name violations. Age, measured as either a continuous variable or dummy variable, is also not a significant predictor of naming labor law violations, challenging the thesis that the new generation of migrant workers have greater rights consciousness.

Table 5 shows the effects of local networks on workers’ grievance filing behaviors. Because only people who named violations answered the question about grievance filing, those who did not were excluded from this part of the analysis. In contrast to the findings regarding Hypothesis 3, a shared employer-worker provincial network does not predict workers’ use of grievance filing channels (M14), nor does a supervisor-worker shared provincial network (M17). Yet, using city and village employer-worker network as key independent variables, respectively, reveals some evidence that sharing a city tied with the employer increases the log odds of grievance filing by 0.97 ($p < 0.1$, M15). The village tie to the employer increased the log odds of grievance filing by 0.76 (M16). The coefficient, however, is not statistically significant, perhaps because only 22 of those naming violations had a shared village network with their employers. Coming from the same village would suggest greater cultural and social affinity, so this hypothesis is worth investigating further.

Concerning Hypothesis 4b, no significant effects emerge of peer network density on workers’ grievance filing. Another interesting question is whether peer network density is associated with workers’ collective actions (such as a protest or strike). However, less than 3% of survey respondents indicated having participated in collective actions during the past year. This sample size is too small to test, but future work should investigate this hypothesis.
### Table 4. Logit Models Predicting Naming and Blaming among People Who Experience Violations

|                      | M7 Any violation | M8 No contract | M9 No insurance | M10 Wage violations | M11 Overtime | M12 OSH | M13 Forced labor |
|----------------------|------------------|----------------|----------------|---------------------|--------------|--------|-----------------|
| Province employer-worker network | -0.445*** | -0.454* | -0.576*** | -0.690** | -0.395 | -0.915** | 0.125 |
| Peer network density | 0.012 | -0.051 | 0.030 | 0.069 | 0.025 | 0.002 | 0.164*** |
| Female | -0.250** | -0.257 | -0.324*** | -0.285 | -0.175 | -0.160 | -0.394* |
| Married | -0.079 | 0.042 | -0.179 | 0.176 | -0.162 | -0.065 | 0.362 |
| Age | 0.004 | 0.005 | 0.003 | 0.009 | 0.011 | 0.003 | -0.006 |
| Education (ref. primary school or lower) | 0.342** | 0.801*** | 0.265* | 0.731*** | 0.617*** | 0.649** | 0.451 |
| Middle school | 0.14 | (0.22) | 0.15 | 0.28 | 0.21 | 0.30 | 0.31 |
| High school or equivalent | 0.291* | 0.986*** | 0.143 | 0.717** | 0.482** | 0.489 | 0.384 |
| Vocational school or higher | 0.420*** | 1.064*** | 0.362 | 0.130 | 0.436 | 0.810 | -0.187 |
| Legal knowledge | 0.002 | -0.025 | 0.006 | 0.004 | 0.021 | 0.029 | -0.015 |
| Tenure | -0.06 | -0.019 | -0.009 | -0.017 | 0.007 | 0.0506* | 0.026 |
| Wage premium (1,000 yuan) | -0.171*** | -0.077 | -0.247*** | -0.096 | -0.208** | -0.278** | -0.238* |
| Union | 0.190 | 0.459 | 0.122 | -0.587* | 0.219 | 0.232 | 0.125 |
| Civil society | -0.413* | 0.899* | -0.240 | 1.325*** | -0.687 | 0.692 | -0.353 |
| Local worker | 0.047 | 1.854 | -0.015 | 0.643 | -0.738 | 0.410 | 0.224 |
| Firm ownership (ref. SOEs) | 0.131 | 0.595 | 0.174 | 0.941** | 0.322 | 0.878** | 0.556* |
| DPEs | 0.16 | (0.40) | 0.19 | 0.40 | 0.28 | 0.42 | 0.29 |
| HMTs | 0.135 | 0.662 | 0.036 | 0.950* | 0.306 | 1.025** | 0.898** |
| FIEs | 0.157 | 0.636 | -0.148 | 2.088*** | 0.239 | 0.332 | 0.349 |
| Firm size (ref. < 100 employees) | 0.131 | 0.595 | 0.174 | 0.941** | 0.322 | 0.878** | 0.556* |
| 100–299 employees | -0.012 | -0.290 | -0.018 | 0.257 | 0.088 | 0.072 | 0.161 |
| 300–999 employees | 0.214* | 0.449* | 0.226 | 0.126 | 0.242 | 0.578 | 0.231 |
| > 1,000 employees | 0.093 | 0.416 | 0.132 | -0.039 | 0.039 | 0.354 | 0.404 |
| Constant | -0.428 | 0.231 | -0.217 | -10.43*** | -2.011 | 0.179 | -0.865 |
| Observations | 3,203 | 1,124 | 2,552 | 678 | 1,345 | 571 | 688 |

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses. All models control for industry, job types, province of origin dummies, and city dummies. DPEs, domestic private enterprises; FIEs, foreign-invested enterprises; HMTs, Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan firms; OSH, occupational safety and health; SOEs, state-owned enterprises.

* $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$. 
Table 5. Logit Models Predicting Grievance Filing (Dependent Variable: Grievance Filing)

|                        | M14       | M15       | M16       | M17       |
|------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Province employer-worker network | 0.549     | 0.973*    | 0.757     | 0.0918    |
| City employer-worker network          | (0.34)    | (0.53)    | (0.63)    | (0.25)    |
| Village employer-worker network         |           |           |           |           |
| Village employer-worker network         |           |           |           |           |
| Province supervisor-worker network | 0.0261    | 0.0264    | 0.0302    | 0.0352    |
| Peer network density                 | (0.06)    | (0.06)    | (0.06)    | (0.06)    |
| Female                                | -0.559*** | -0.581*** | -0.542**  | -0.561*** |
| Married                               | 0.331     | 0.325     | 0.314     | 0.307     |
| Age                                   | -0.0152   | -0.0157   | -0.014    | -0.0142   |
| Education (ref. primary school or lower) |          |           |           |           |
| Middle school                         | -0.432    | -0.434    | -0.419    | -0.457    |
| High school or equivalent             | -0.588*   | -0.587*   | -0.572*   | -0.606*   |
| Vocational school or higher           | 0.229     | 0.205     | 0.23      | 0.193     |
| Legal knowledge                       | 0.0415**  | 0.0417**  | 0.0408**  | 0.0403**  |
| Local worker                          | 0.315     | 0.281     | 0.278     | 0.316     |
| Tenure                                | 0.0239    | 0.0215    | 0.0219    | 0.0248    |
| Wage premium (1,000 yuan)             | 0.0939    | 0.0874    | 0.0916    | 0.103     |
| Union                                 | 0.207     | 0.217     | 0.21      | 0.217     |
| Civil society                         | 1.207*    | 1.235*    | 1.204*    | 1.191*    |
| Firm ownership (ref. SOEs)            |           |           |           |           |
| DPEs                                  | -0.0781   | -0.0765   | -0.0687   | -0.0668   |
| HMTs                                  | -0.438    | -0.439    | -0.45     | -0.448    |
| FIEs                                  | 0.0142    | 0.0394    | 0.0336    | 0.0193    |
| Firm size (ref. < 100 employees)      |           |           |           |           |
| 100–299 employees                     | 0.161     | 0.182     | 0.168     | 0.137     |
| 300–999 employees                     | -0.387    | -0.396    | -0.385    | -0.405    |
| > 1,000 employees                     | -0.239    | -0.235    | -0.234    | -0.265    |
| Constant                              | 1.55      | 1.545     | 1.497     | 1.525     |
| Observations                          | 782       | 782       | 782       | 782       |

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses. All models control for industry, job types, province of origin dummies, and city dummies. DPEs, domestic private enterprises; FIEs, foreign-invested enterprises; HMTs, Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan firms; SOEs, state-owned enterprises. 
*p < 0.10; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01.
Among those who named violations, workers with greater knowledge of the labor law and other laws and regulations were more likely to use grievance channels. Similar to the results uncovered at the stage of naming and blaming, I find no age effect (using both continuous and dummy age variable). A strong gender effect, however, did emerge regarding grievance filing: Women are significantly less likely to use organizational grievance channels than men are ($p < 0.01$). The underlying factors that may shape women’s perception of labor law violations and their grievance filing behavior deserve further investigation. Finally, union existence fails to predict grievance filing. At the same time, however, those who worked in communities with civil society organizations are more likely to use organizational grievance channels ($p < 0.1$). This result supports findings on the potential mobilizing power of civil society organizations (Gleeson 2009).

**Conclusion and Future Research Agenda**

Despite recent legislative efforts to address labor concerns, violations of Chinese labor law are rampant among rural-to-urban migrant workers. One important reason for the weak enforcement of labor law is that migrant workers do not pursue possible cases through formal or legal channels. Using data on Chinese migrant workers’ grievance behaviors, this article makes two contributions to the employee grievance literature. First, by building the subjective interpretation process into the theoretical models of grievances, I find that only 25% of migrant workers who experienced labor law violations subjectively named the experience as a violation of their rights and interests. Identifying present conditions as problematic or injurious is a key step before taking action. Therefore, limiting worker grievance to formal dispute resolution procedures erases a large number of unreported cases and hampers our understanding of workers’ experiences.

Second, I find that the likelihood of experiencing and naming and blaming violations are influenced by workers’ social identities and relationships with their employers. A shared local network between the employer and worker was positively associated with contract violation, suggesting that the informal social control mechanisms in local networks relieved workers’ felt need for a contract. Those who shared a local network with their employer are significantly less likely to recognize (name and blame) labor law violations than were their counterparts. A shared tie with the employer appears to be key; supervisor-worker shared local networks and working with more coworkers from the same home location fails to predict workers’ recognition of violations or grievance filing.

The article also makes empirical contributions to the literature on labor rights in China, which has largely been based on ethnography and limited to case studies. Much of the research has focused on strikes and other forms of extra-legal action, but the findings of this study suggest the prevalence of unreported labor law violations. If all those working in conditions that are
not compliant with legal requirements were to pursue their rights through legal or extra-legal actions, the number of arbitration cases and collective actions would likely be much higher. In addition, the limited effects of age on experiences with, recognition of, and reactions to labor law violations offer an important supplement to the youth empowerment literature (Franceschini, Siu, and Chan 2016; Lee 2016), which has focused primarily on collective actions. The findings on gender and civil society organizations, while perhaps not surprising, provide important evidence on the role of gender and voluntary associations in accounting for grievance behaviors.

The generalizability of the results presented in this article need to be investigated in future work on contemporary China and elsewhere. The findings on migrant workers’ experience of labor law violations may still be highly valid today, as the national rate of most types of these violations has barely changed (see Table 1). It remains an open question, however, of whether workers’ recognition and response to labor law violations have changed since the survey used in this research was conducted. In addition, because of the unbalanced development of labor NGOs and regional union reforms across China, future work should investigate whether the naming, blaming, and grievance filing rates differ across geographic areas. Additionally, the sampled cities used in this research receive the largest number of migrants from all over the country. Given their great number, it is possible that sharing a place of origin with the employer would be more relevant in these socially heterogeneous environments. Whether the network effects still hold in provinces that receive a larger share of rural workers within the province also deserves attention in future work. More broadly, an expanded grievance model that considers subjective interpretations as well as grievance actions, and that considers non-work social relationships, needs to be applied in settings outside of China, including in future research on immigrant and migrant workers in a variety of economies.
Appendix

Table A.1. Labor Law Violations

| Labor law violations                  | Description                                                                                                                                 |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| No social insurance                  | Respondents to the survey were asked whether their current employers provided pension insurance, medical insurance, work injury insurance, unemployment insurances, and maternity insurance. *No social insurance* is a dummy that equals 1 if the respondent does not have all five types of social insurance required by the law. |
| No labor contract                    | One question in the survey asks, “Have you ever signed a written labor contract in your current firm?” *No labor contract* equals 1 if the worker answered no to this question, 0 otherwise. |
| Overtime                             | Chinese labor law prohibits employers from requiring their employees to work overtime for more than 36 hours per month. One question in the survey asks the respondents, “Have you ever worked overtime since January 1, 2010?” Workers who answered yes to this question were required to report their overtime hours in the previous month. I code *Overtime* as a dummy variable that equals 1 if their overtime work exceeded 36 hours the month before the interview, 0 otherwise. |
| Wage violations                      | Wage violation equals 1 if the employee has experienced any of the following violations: 1) The Labor Law provides that employees must be compensated if they work overtime. One question in the survey asks, “Does your current firm have overtime compensation?” Overtime without compensation is a dummy variable that equals 1 if the respondent answered no to this question, and overtime equals 1. 2) The Labor Law requires that wages shall not be misappropriated nor shall the employer fall in arrears without justification. The survey asks, “Since January 1, 2010, have you ever been imposed a fine or wage deduction at your current firm?” For those who answered yes, they were asked, “Does the firm impose the fine or deduction following institutional rules?” I code wage misappropriation as 1 if the worker answered no to this question, 0 otherwise. 3) The survey asks, “Since January 1, 2010, have you ever experienced wage arrears in your current firm?” Wage arrears is coded as 1 if the respondent answered yes to the question, 0 otherwise. 4) Under China’s minimum wage system, minimum wage levels are fixed by local governments and are regularly adjusted. The survey asks about respondents’ average monthly wage since January 2010. I code Below Minimum as 1 if the worker’s monthly wage is below the city minimum wage in 2010, 0 otherwise. |
| Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) | The Labor Law requires employers to provide necessary protective equipment, such as goggles, work clothes, head covering, and other items needed for the protection of workers. For workers in dangerous occupations or exposed to hazardous substances, the employer is required to provide regular medical examination at the expense of the company. In the survey, workers were asked a series of questions related to their experience of health and safety violations. OSH equals 1 if workers experienced any of these two violations, 0 otherwise. 1) Unprotected work. The survey asks, “Since August 1, 2009, have you worked under dangerous conditions without protection in your current firm?” Unprotected work equals 1 if the respondent answered yes, 0 otherwise. |
Table A.1. Continued

| Labor law violations          | Description                                                                 |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2) Hazardous work without exam. | The survey asks, “Since August 1, 2009, have you worked in a hazardous environment (such as exposed to hazardous substance and noise) in the current firm?” It also asks, “Have you ever received a free physical exam in your current firm?” Hazardous work without exam is a dummy variable, which equals 1 if the worker reported that the working environment in the current firm is physically harmful (i.e., exposes workers to hazardous substance, noise, etc.) and the current firm did not provide physical examinations. |
| Forced labor                  | Both Chinese Labor Law and Criminal Law explicitly prohibit forced labor. Forced labor refers to situations in which workers are coerced to work using intimidation or violence, or are manipulated by debt or retention of identity papers. Forced Labor equals 1 if workers experienced any of these two violations. |
| 1) Physical abuse             | The survey asks, “Since August 1, 2009, have you experienced forced labor, penalty kneeling and standing, improper search, battery, or seizure by the management?” If the worker experienced any of these experiences, physical abuse is coded as 1, 0 otherwise. |
| 2) A prevalent form of Labor Law violation is employee paying “deposits” to the employer in forms of money or documents. These “deposits” prevent workers from leaving jobs where their rights are violated. In the survey, the respondents were asked two questions: (a) “When you joined the current firm, did you pay a money deposit?” and (b) “When you joined the current firm, were your government-issued ID, graduation certificate, or (temporal) residence permit detained by the management?” Deposit is a dummy variable that equals 1 if the worker answered yes to any of these two questions, 0 otherwise. |
| Any violation                 | Any violation is a dummy variable that equals 1 if the workers experienced any of the six types of violations, 0 otherwise. |

Table A.2. Key Control Variables Description

| Variable | Description                                                                                                                                 |
|----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Female   | Female (= 1 if the respondent is female, 0 otherwise) workers are more likely to work in gender-segregated, low-paying jobs but less likely to work in physically demanding positions or at dangerous sites. Previous research suggests that female workers are less likely to name and claim violations because of their lack of informal networks of information, avoidance of conflict (Gwartney-Gibbs and Lach 1994), and the internalized discipline of subordinates (Lee 1998). |
| Age      | Age is a continuous variable relating to the respondents’ age in 2010. The existing literature stresses the awakening and rights consciousness of the new generation of migrant workers (Chan and Pun 2009; Pun and Lu 2010), which suggests that younger migrant workers may be less likely to work for employers who violate the labor laws and more likely to name and claim the violations. Because the existing literature usually defines the new generation of migrant workers as those who were born from 1980 and onward, I also create a dummy variable Post80 as an alternative measure. |

(continued)
| Variable                                  | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Education and legal knowledge             | Respondents’ educational level and legal knowledge have been found to be associated with their job quality as well as their inclination to file grievances (Gallagher, Giles, Park, and Wang 2015). Education equals 0 if the respondents’ highest degree is primary school, 1 if middle school, 2 if high school or technical secondary school, and 3 if vocational school or higher. Legal knowledge is coded based on seven survey questions about respondents’ familiarity with seven labor laws and regulations. The seven laws and regulations are Labor Law, Labor Contract Law, Employment Promotion Law, Minimum Wage Regulation, Regulation on Payment and Wages, Regulation on Work Injury Insurance, and Law on the Protection of Rights and Interest of Women. The respondents were given a score based on their familiarity with each law or regulation (5 = very familiar, 4 = familiar, 3 = somewhat familiar, 2 = not familiar, 1 = have not heard about it). Legal Knowledge is a continuous variable ranging from 7 to 35, as the sum of the scores on the seven questions. |
| Wage premium                              | Wage premium is measured as the difference between the respondents’ average monthly wage since January 1, 2010, and the city’s monthly minimum wage in 2010. The city minimum wage data were collected from the Human Resources and Social Security Bureau websites of each city. The wage premium is a proxy for the value of current employment over alternative jobs in the external market. The wage premium measure may include measurement errors because local regulations on whether workers’ own social insurance contributions should be included in the wage package vary by region. It is unknown whether workers included their social security contributions when they reported their monthly wage. |
| Union                                     | Union is a dummy variable that equals 1 if workers reported an enterprise labor union is in their firm or a regional union in their community. Although Chinese labor unions have always been criticized for being “paper unions,” recent research suggests that unions have heterogeneous organizing strategies (Liu 2010; Friedman 2014), bureaucratic power to settle conflicts (Chen 2003), and positive effects on employees’ wage and welfare (Yao and Zhong 2013). I expect that the presence of unions will be negatively correlated with experiencing labor law violations, and that workers will be more likely to name and claim violations if there are labor unions in their firms or communities. |
| Civil society                             | Civil society is a dummy variable that equals 1 if workers reported the presence of a women workers’ association, NGO, or religious group in their community. Workers may learn about their legal rights through these organizations, which may also help them navigate grievance resolution channels (Klandermans, van der Toorn, and van Stekelenburg 2008; Fu 2017). I expected that workers’ embeddedness in these civil society organizations would reduce the likelihood of experiencing labor law violations and increase the likelihood of naming and claiming violations. |
| Firm size                                 | Firm size is a categorical variable that equals 0 if the firm has fewer than 100 employees, 1 if the firm has 100 to 299 employees, 2 if the firm has 300 to 999 employees, and 3 if the number of employees equals or exceeds 1,000. |
| Industry                                  | Industry includes agriculture and mining, manufacturing, construction, utilities, and service industry. |
| Firm ownership                            | Firm ownership includes state and collectively owned enterprises (SOEs); domestic private enterprises (DPEs); Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan firms (HMTs); and other foreign-invested enterprises (FIEs). |
| Job types                                 | Job type includes production workers, technicians, logistics workers, line supervisors or foremen, quality inspectors, clerk, waiter, security guard, cleaner, driver, salesperson, construction workers, and others. |
| Local worker dummy                        | Local worker dummy equals 1 if respondents work in their home province, 0 otherwise. |
| Tenure                                    | It measures workers’ tenure (year) at the current firm. |
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