

Masculine Compromise: Migration, Family, and Gender in China. By Susanne Yuk-Ping Choi and Yinni Peng. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016, 200 pp., \$85.00 (cloth); \$29.95 (paper).

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In *Masculine Compromise*, Choi and Peng explore the impact of rural-to-urban migration on the patriarchal family system in post-Mao China. They examine how migrant men navigate the contradictions between urban and rural ideals of masculinity and the conflicts brought about by attempting to be a good father, husband, and son from afar. They detail how migrant men reconstruct their male identities and forge new subjectivities by engaging in different types of “masculine compromise.” In order to give an account of both intergenerational and conjugal dynamics affected by migration, Choi and Peng empirically examine (a) how migrant men negotiate the household division of labor and power dynamics with their wives, and (b) how they cope with their separation from young children and elderly parents left behind in rural areas. Using data from in-depth interviews with 192 migrant men and 74 migrant women in three cities in South China between 2012 and 2015, Choi and Peng argue that most migrant males retain a commitment to patrilineal and patrilocal practices, the two main roots of the rural patriarchal family system, while making concessions on the traditional gendered division of labor in families. These practices of “masculine compromise” are pragmatic strategies for balancing ideals and reality, rather than a shift in cultural values. Thus, the authors argue that it remains to be seen whether these masculine compromises are temporary practices particular to the condition of migration, or are indicative of an emerging masculine habitus that leads to lasting change in the patriarchal family system.

Masculine Compromise provides a comprehensive perspective on post-migration intrahousehold dynamics. Choi and Peng effectively situate migrant males’ voices and emotions at the intersection of structural, relational, and individual-level factors. Chapter 2 details the sociopolitical and economic context of rural masculinity, rural-to-urban migration, and the

patriarchal family system in post-Mao China. This chapter contextualizes migrant experiences in relation to recent changes in migration policy and the household registration (*hukou*) system. Migrant males' subjective voices, practices, identities, and emotions are the focus of the remaining chapters. Chapter 3 discusses how migrant men navigate courtship, sexuality, and marriage after urban migration. Chapters 4 and 5 highlight conjugal dynamics, looking at how migrant men and their wives reconcile traditional gender roles and norms with the realities of urban life. Chapters 6 and 7 examine how migrant men interpret and redefine their roles as fathers and sons, in relation to cultural norms about fatherhood and filial piety. These men face strong emotions because of their physical absence from their families and their continued economic deficiencies. The nuanced portrayal of the emotions of migrant males makes this book especially important for those interested in research on masculinity and emotion.

The primary contribution of this book is Choi and Peng's insightful framework of "masculine compromise," which they use throughout the book to vividly describe the strategies and practices of migrant men. Though most of their respondents retain a commitment to rural patriarchal ideals, in the context of migration, they must give up a certain amount of power in marriage, accept a nontraditional household division of labor, and redefine fatherhood and filial piety. Choi and Peng clearly illustrate that these compromises actually help maintain traditional gender ideologies, and sometimes serve to maintain male dominance within families. Their respondents do not interpret their practices as working toward gender equality. Instead, they either see these practices as pragmatic, context-specific concessions or they attach new gendered meanings to the practices. As Choi and Peng suggest, the responses of migrant males to their changing contexts cannot be understood within the dichotomous framework of resistance or conformity. They use the concept of "masculine compromise" to more accurately describe changing practices and identities.

The book clearly demonstrates that men are not a homogeneous group by highlighting important class difference between migrant men and urban men. However, the rural masculinity Choi and Peng describe as rooted in the traditional patriarchal family system is assumed to be homogeneous. This leaves the reader with a one-dimensional, and particularly heteronormative, picture of contemporary rural masculinity. A broader understanding of masculinities could be brought into future research to examine the changing practices of masculinities across diverse rural families.

Masculine Compromise makes important contributions to the fields of gender and sexuality, men and masculinities, migration, family, urbanization,

and China studies. The clarity of writing and care taken to provide historical context make the book accessible to those less familiar with the socioeconomic context of China. The book would be well suited for use in graduate seminars or upper-level undergraduate courses.

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