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Book Reviews

Masculine Compromise: Migration, Family, and Gender in China. Susanne YP Choi and Yinni Peng. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016. 200 pp., £24.00 (pb). ISBN: 9780520288287

In *Masculine Compromise*, Choi and Peng analyse how rural-to-urban migration has shaped gender relations in migrant families, focusing particularly on men's experiences and narratives of manhood. Drawing on interviews with 192 men and 74 migrant women from three cities in Southeast China, this book gives voice to a largely ignored group – migrant men in China – and explores their experiences at different life stages. Individuals' experiences are theorised in relation to the broader social and political context that situates them. Chapter 2, for example, gives readers a glimpse of migrant men's *dagong* (migration for work) lives in the context of China's policies regarding migration. Despite the changing migration policies which afford people greater mobility rights, however, drastic inequalities persist between the urban and the rural, and migrant men continue to be marginalised in cities. Such marginalisation stands in sharp contrast to men's dominance in rural China. Migrant men, therefore, constantly deal with the discrepancy between their cultural ideals and actual practices.

Chapter 3 illustrates how young and single migrant men's aspirations for westernised ideals of romantic love and intimacy are harshly confronted by the reality of their marginalised positions in urban society. These men often compromise such ideals, returning to their villages to marry local girls, while seeking a balance between their parents' wishes and their own autonomy in courtships and marriage practices.

Chapters 4 and 5 shift the focus to married men and power negotiations within their marriages, in terms of decision-making and the gendered division of labour. Migration has provided novel contexts for couples' marital negotiations. The lack of extended family support, for example, means that migrant men are responsible for more equal shares of housework. The men in this study responded by compromising on small issues while holding onto principles that they refuse to compromise over – such as patrilineality and patrilocality, which are often regarded as the foundation of Chinese patriarchy. Moreover, migrant men also reproduce the discourse of 'respectable manhood' (p. 101), which ties their masculinity to the ways that they care for their families.

Chapters 6 and 7 turn to the men's intergenerational negotiations and their roles as fathers and sons. The structural obstacles migrants face compel them to leave their children in the care of their families back home. Practising fatherhood from a distance compels the men to be emotionally expressive, which challenges the traditional view of Chinese fathers as authoritative, rational and unemotional. Moreover, being a good father

as well as being a filial son is actively incorporated into the men's constructions of manhood and masculinity. While the cultural ideal of providing dedicated care is still dominant, in reality, the care that can be provided is often insufficient. This has pushed migrant men to rethink the meaning of filial piety, and to use strategies such as collaborative and crisis care (p. 135).

All these sophisticated discussions lay the theoretical grounds for the framework of 'masculine compromise', which is a compelling and explanatory framework that accurately captures how migrant men use their autonomy to maintain their dominance by compromising over certain issues. Although men's changing practices point to the potential of constructing more equal gender relations, the authors acknowledge uncertainty about whether these changes are temporary or can endure over time.

While the theoretical framework underpinning *Masculine Compromise* is undoubtedly strong, the book would benefit from a closer engagement with theories of masculinity from the west. Emotionality also seems to play a greater role in the theorisation of intergenerational relationships, whereas it seems less visible in conjugal negotiations. One may wonder about the particular reason for this, since intimacy and emotion are widely recognised to be of increasing importance in marriages in China. Moreover, it would be useful to provide more contexts of the three cities that this research is based upon, since they may have different migration policies that would provide different context for migrant men's negotiation of masculinity.

In general, this well-written, persuasive and enjoyable book is a timely and much-needed contribution to the literature of rural-to-urban migration in China. It would be useful for researchers who are interested in gender and family relationships, manhood and masculinity, and domestic migration in China.

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Social Mobility for the 21st Century: Everyone a Winner? Steph Lawler and Geoff Payne (eds). New York: Routledge, 2018. pp. 184, £115 (hbk). ISBN: 9781138244894

> Social mobility is one such optimistic fantasy that ensnares and works
> on both the individual psyche and collective consciousness.
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> (Reay, Chapter 11, p. 146)

This timely book offers a long-needed update to social mobility studies within the social sciences, drawing upon a much more critical approach which questions the assumption that social mobility is inherently 'good'. Its call in the introduction for a better understanding of the personal stories behind mobility utilising a methodological pluralism is essentially what the book presents, with a move beyond the often-simplistic measure of occupational ladder movement. This book succeeds in its aims to extend and advocate further mobility studies with more reflection on the consequences of mobility, and as such should appeal to not only mobility scholars but to anybody who has an interest in the reproduction of structural social inequalities.