

For all these reasons, a more thorough political-science treatment of the country's natural resource sector is unlikely to come along for a long time. Zhan's book will be a valuable addition to syllabi on Chinese politics and political economy more generally. And it ought to inform broader public debates about the forces that quite literally power China's rise.

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Searching for Sweetness: Women's Mobile Lives in China and Lesotho

SARAH HANISCH

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Over the past 15 years, Chinese migration to Africa has received sustained scholarly attention as an important dimension of China's growing engagement in the continent. Researchers have not only debunked various myths and rumours of Chinese state-sponsored mass-migration schemes and Chinese convict labourers in Africa, but also produced in-depth analyses of Chinese migrant groups' economic activities and their interactions and relations with Africans on the ground. However, it is still difficult to find studies that investigate the local Chinese contexts that have given rise to Chinese migration to Africa, or fine-grained ethnographies that document Chinese women's migration journeys and experiences in Africa. This gap in the literature is surprising because migrants from the same hometown tend to concentrate in specific sectors (for example, Shanglin people in small-scale gold mining in West Africa, and Fuqingese traders in the retail and wholesale business in southern Africa) and because Chinese migrants in Africa today, unlike their predecessors, are joined by an increasing number of women who travel to realize their own aspirations.

Sarah Hanisch's *Searching for Sweetness: Women's Mobile Lives in China and Lesotho* is a timely and welcome contribution to the study of contemporary Chinese migrants in Africa. The book is a multi-sited ethnography that traces the life journeys of ten Chinese women who strived to search for "sweetness" both in Fuqing and Lesotho. While most of these women had initially migrated domestically from their rural homes to Fuqing, a county-level city in Fujian province well known for its long history of outward migration and recent economic success, they represent three different cohorts of women migrants: "those born in the late Mao era, in the first reform decade, and in the second reform decade" (p. 4). Hanisch's core contribution is twofold. First, she shows how China's domestic rural-to-urban migration and Chinese migration to Africa are interconnected. Second, she argues that the Chinese state's metanarratives of "development," "modernity" and "bitterness/sweetness" continue to provide the framework for ordinary people as they try to obtain "sweetness," which entails both material success and social status.

The chapters in the book are not organized chronologically but spatially. In chapters two and three, the author demonstrates how individual women's struggles were closely tied to the transformation of Fuqing in the post-reform era. Although the three cohorts of women were faced with distinct challenges, they all took up the state's metanarratives of *yiku sitian* (remembering bitterness, appreciating sweetness) and *fendou* (struggle) to motivate themselves in search of personal and family

“development” and “sweetness.” Chapters four and five take the readers to the remote mountainous kingdom of Lesotho, to where the Fuqingese women migrated and operated shops and supermarkets. While they continued to view their lives through the lenses of “eat bitterness” and *pinming* (work tirelessly), they were perceived differently from white traders who had established monopolies in the country’s retail and wholesale sector previously and who are remembered fondly as “the pillar of the community” (p. 84). More importantly, due to the shifts in Lesotho’s development strategy and the 1998 violent political riots, younger Fuqingese women lived in fear that the success stories of the Fuqingese pioneers would not be possible anymore and began to question the utility of *pinming*. Chapter six discusses how the Fuqingese women reflected on their past choices, including their decisions to leave or stay in Lesotho. It is followed by a concluding chapter, in which the author points to how “the multilayered, complex, and ever-shifting struggle of ordinary people’s searches for sweetness” can enrich our understanding of China’s economic success and global position in the 21st century.

Two crucial features animate the book. Throughout the book, the author skilfully uses Chinese terms to allow her interlocutors to tell life stories in their own words. As the author rightly explains, this is not to “mystify China or Chinese people” but to “argue against monolithic views on China and Chinese people” (p. 10). The other strength of the book lies in the author’s extraordinary mastery of Fuqing’s and Lesotho’s local histories. For instance, the author goes into detail about Fuqingese women’s rural lives and their later employment in modern factories, the rise and fall of Lesotho’s white trading stations, the arrival of Taiwanese garment industries in Lesotho and the tension they had with local workers, and the decline of Maseru’s bus stop area as its commercial hub. All of these historical accounts have provided necessary contexts for and added fascinating texture to the book’s storyline.

An important contribution to the field, the book nevertheless does have some minor limitations. First is the book’s lack of systemic data on Fuqingese migration. It would have helped better contextualize the ten women in the discussion if the author had included concrete statistics of contemporary Fuqingese migration, especially its global distribution, generational and gender composition, and its future trajectory. Second, the author has offered illuminating accounts of how her interlocutors defied old ideas about proper gender roles by working hard to cultivate business as well as how white traders and Fuqingese migrants were evaluated differently by the Basotho. But as a reader, I want to know more about the actual division of labour and gender dynamics in business and how the Basotho perceived the roles played by these women vis-à-vis Chinese men. Third, readers familiar with the Chinese language will question a couple of Chinese expressions used in the text. For instance, *junlongwutou* (p. 92) might be mistaken for *qunlongwushou* 群龙无首 (many dragons without a head), and *jianli fendou* (p. 129) might well be *jianku fendou* 艰苦奋斗 (struggle arduously and perseveringly). These might be just typographical errors.

With her vivid ethnographic descriptions and balanced analysis, Sarah Hanisch succeeds in linking Chinese internal rural-to-urban migration and international migration. The author also provides a much-needed gendered view of contemporary Chinese migrants in Africa. The trusting relationships Hanisch has nurtured with her interlocutors and her lucid writing style contribute to the book’s readability. *Searching for Sweetness* will be of great interest to scholars who work on Chinese migration, gender studies and southern African regional history.

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