

socialism” and promote socialist core values. When the pursuit of market share and the promotion of socialist core values prove contradictory, which I would argue is often, the former has tended to be privileged over the latter, which is why it is not unusual for the domestic box office to be frequently dominated by such franchise film blockbusters as the “*Tiny Times*” (*Xiao shidai*) series, which strongly promote conspicuous consumption, or by mere escapist entertainment. Indeed, even the definition of what constitutes socialist core values has been contested in CCP journals, with some critics suggesting that the current overly broad conception has robbed them of their original ideological and political coherence. At the same time, the need to project only positive images of China overseas has meant that officially sanctioned culture has virtually no international influence, strongly constraining another CCP goal, the promotion of cultural soft power.

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Out to Work: Migration, Gender and the Changing Lives of Rural Women in Contemporary China

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The migration of young women from rural to urban China is a topic which has attracted considerable scholarly attention in the last decade. Arianne Gaetano's book, which draws on over ten years of in-depth ethnographic research with migrant women in Beijing, offers an unusually intimate picture of the changing impact of migration on women between 1998 and 2000.

The book's main focus centres on the far-from-novel question of whether migration empowers women and improves gender equality. What *is* novel is the longitudinal approach, as well as the close relationships that Gaetano has built up with key respondents (migrant women now in their 30s), providing the reader with an unexpectedly detailed and nuanced account of the processes of rural–urban migration, urban integration and the reshaping of rural women's lives and identities. The book is therefore a valuable contribution to the existing literature on Chinese women's migration, adding a personal, in-depth perspective on this increasingly important phenomenon. Its vivid and engaging style ensures that it will appeal not only to scholars of migration, sociology, social development and labour studies, but also to undergraduate students and perhaps even non-specialists with an interest in China.

Out to Work consists of six chapters, some revised from the author's earlier publications, which explore the impacts of rural–urban migration on women's family and intimate relations, work, and life in the city, with a particular focus on women's agency and identity. The chapters are structured both thematically and chronologically, so that changes in women's lives are presented over successive chapters. In chapter one, Gaetano outlines the background to women's migration, reviewing macro-historical factors which have shaped migration in China since the start of the Reform Era. Chapter two examines meso- and micro-level contexts of migration, including the roles of individuals and households and the gendered nature of decision-

making processes. It is illustrated by a focus on the particular story of one migrant, and the use of extracts from her diaries enlivens the analysis.

Chapter three is particularly interesting, demonstrating how social networks of kin and co-villagers have two opposing effects. On the one hand, they facilitate migration, employment and integration, increase women's social capital and provide increased entry into the urban public sphere. On the other, they allow the extension of rural patriarchal power structures and ideology into the city through the "guarding" of women's moral reputations, and restrict women's autonomy in the city in both employment choice and personal life. Here, Gaetano uses the stories of sisters Shuqin and Shuchun, drawn from interview data and personal letters, to excellent effect in illustrating the competing pressures on young women within such networks.

Chapter four deals with women's work and working conditions. While there is nothing especially surprising here, Gaetano provides a good account of the obstacles and risks that rural women face in the urban labour market, as well as the ways in which women develop skills and resources useful in their families as well as in their employment. Chapter five examines the migrants' changing identities as they adapt to urban culture, and skilfully demonstrates how these women are able, at least in part, to remodel themselves into sophisticated city-dwellers through consciously shifting tastes, looks and consumption.

Chapter six then turns to courtship, marriage and motherhood. Much of the material on courtship is familiar from other literature, including Gaetano's own previous research on migrant women's sexuality, but the exploration of post-marital experiences, although short, is fascinating. Drawing on interviews with the five migrant women whose lives form the backbone of the book, Gaetano contrasts their pre-marriage aspirations with the realities of their early married lives. Difficulties in balancing work and childcare, changing relations with in-laws and natal families and problems in accessing urban education for children with rural *hukou* are common concerns, and Gaetano succeeds very well in bringing the seldom-heard voices of married migrant women to the fore.

Throughout the book, Gaetano shows compellingly that gender is integral to migrant women's experiences in Beijing, and that migration has an important impact on gender relations and roles. She illustrates vividly the structural barriers to rural women's urban integration, the hardship and discrimination that they suffer, and the precariousness of their urban lives, yet comes down firmly on the side of the optimists: migration increases rural women's opportunities to exercise agency, increases their social and economic standing, and allows them to build better lives for themselves and their families. In my view, this is convincing. However, as the brief glimpses of these women's lives after marriage suggest, their futures may not be entirely rosy. For migrants to assimilate fully into the emerging urban middle class, significant structural change will be necessary from the Chinese state, in particular reform of the education system and the *hukou*, as well as willingness from municipal as well as central governments to address the needs of migrant workers and their dependents. If Gaetano continues to write about these women over the next decade, as I hope she will, we may gain a clearer idea of whether such changes are forthcoming.

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