

# Migration and Masculinity Continuity, Change, and Compromise

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# Research Questions

- How does masculinity shape decisions to migrate?
- How does migration change masculinity?
  - Migration as spatial mobility reveals, and is propelled by, fundamental inequalities between regions and creative human efforts to overcome them.
  - Migration brings to the fore material and symbolic boundaries uniting and dividing groups, and commonality and differences between cultures and communities.
  - The experience of migration may therefore unsettle established identities, including those related to gender.



# Gaps in the Literature

- Feminist scholars have striven to foreground the interrelationship between migration and gender in the past three decades. This literature has shed light on the centrality of the gender order in structuring the decisions of migration, the process and outcome of settlement in the host society, and decisions about return. In spite of this literature's contribution, the interrelationship between migration and masculinity has not received sufficient attention.



# Why Migration and Masculinity?

- As Connell (1992) has aptly put it, 'the study of men is as vital for gender analysis as the study of ruling classes and elites is for class analysis' (p.736). While women are not born, but become women (Beauvoir 1952), maleness and men as a dominant social category have been problematized rather than taken for granted (Kimmel, Hearn and Connell 2005).
- Making masculinity visible within the context of migration would therefore help to illuminate how this pivotal social institution in a globalized world is related to the production, maintenance and potential changes of inequalities between men and women, and inequalities between different groups of men.



# Possible Interplays Between Migration and Masculinity

- In the context of migration between developing and developed regions, men's migration is often propelled by the role of men as providers within the family and normative expectations about manhood that emphasize adventure and risk-taking.
- The process of migration entails changing social positions, which gives rise to uncertainty that leads to tension surrounding men's patriarchal dominance.



# The Present Study

- Uses the specific experiences of male rural-to-urban migrants in post-socialist China to examine the interplay between migration and masculinity, as it unfolds in the familial context.





# 售票处

坚决打击一



网易论坛





- National Capital (11,510,000 in 2000)
- over 10,000,000
- over 6,000,000
- over 2,500,000
- over 1,000,000
- other main city
- other city
- Capital of autonomous region
- Capital of province
- Shanghai Government-controlled municipality
- Hong Kong\* Special administrative region









# Migration – a means to measure up to normative manhood





# Young, Single Rural Migrants Doing Desire In Urban China





# Renegotiating Masculinity within Conjugal Relationship



# Changing Fatherhood and Revising Masculine Script





# Changing Fatherhood and Revising Masculine Script





# Changing Fatherhood and Revising Masculine Script



# Continuity

- The present study understands masculinity not only as a culturally normative ideal of manhood at the ideological and discursive level, but also as personal practice that is closely tied up with the institutions of the state and new forms of inequality.
- In rural China, becoming and being a man often means migrating to the city for a higher paid job to support one's family. Although increasingly women in rural China are migrating in great numbers before and even after their marriage; a considerable number of rural women have stayed to care for their families after marriage whereas their husbands maintain their migrant work.
- A reverse of the 'men outside/women inside' pattern is only culturally permissible if the husband is able to hold on to a stable source of income generating opportunity in rural areas. In other words, rural men can hardly ever stay behind 'just' to care for their families and let their wives migrate for work. Many migrant men, despite their emotional longing for their children and ageing parents, feel that they cannot return.
- In this sense, rural-to-urban migration ensures the preservation of traditional gender norms of men outside and women inside, and the continuity of masculinity centring on men's provider roles during China's dramatic social changes and economic transformation.



# Change

- Migrating from a less developed region to a more developed region may increase the absolute income of migrants and facilitate their access to urban culture and ways of life. It also frees them from traditional communal and parental control.
- Young migrants in particular welcome their new found freedom to pursue romantic life.
- Yet migration cannot only be understood in financial terms. To migrate is to experience a different cultural and social dynamic, and to negotiate the possible differences between the community of origin and the destination society.
- Culturally, we have seen how young and single male migrants and fathers revise their dating and fatherhood scripts after they are exposed to urban dating culture and middle class ideal about fatherhood.
- Yet these changes are often incomplete and fragmented because of male migrants' disadvantaged socioeconomic status and subsequent lack of resources to live up to urban ideals of manhood that are often premised on success in a capitalist economy.





# Compromise

- Very often migration to urban areas results in downward mobility, loss of social status, and changing power hierarchies in the family that require migrant men to make compromises.
- For example, we have seen how male married rural-to-urban migrants make compromises on marital power by distinguishing big and small decisions. By so doing, these migrants preserve the gender boundary of men handling 'big' decisions and women looking after 'small' decisions, thus upholding men's symbolic dominance within the family.
- These 'masculine compromises' (Choi and Peng, 2016) reveal how the effects of migration on family and gender relationships in post-socialist China are characterized by a combination of pragmatic adjustments and the continued salience of male gender identity and traditional ideology.



# MASCULINE COMPROMISE



MIGRATION, FAMILY, AND GENDER IN CHINA

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