The Children of China’s Great Migration

In China in 2018, there were over 280 million rural off-farm and migrant workers, approximately 173 million of whom moved beyond the borders of their registered hometowns, fuelling the country’s rapid economic boom. In the 2010s over 61 million rural children had at least one parent who had migrated without them, while nearly half had been left behind by both parents. Rachel Murphy draws on her longitudinal fieldwork in two landlocked provinces to explore the experiences of these left-behind children and to examine the impact of this great migration on childhood and family relationships in China. Using children’s voices, Murphy provides a multifaceted insight into experiences of parental migration, education, study pressures, poverty, institutional discrimination, patrilineal family culture and reconfigured gendered and intergenerational relationships.

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The Children of China’s Great Migration

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