



Cosmologies of Credit: Transnational Mobility and the Politics of Destination in China

Julie Y. Chu

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Year after year a woman sits in her bare living quarters with her bags packed. She is waiting for a phone call from her snakehead, or human smuggler. That longed-for call will send her out her door, away from Fuzhou, China, on a perilous, illicit journey to the United States. Nothing diffuses the promise of an overseas destiny: neither the ever-increasing smuggling fee for successful travel nor her knowledge of the deadly risks in transit and the exploitative labor conditions abroad. The sense of imminent departure enchants her every move and overshadows the banalities of her present life. In this engrossing ethnographic account of how the Fuzhounese translate their desires for mobility into projects worth pursuing, Julie Y. Chu focuses on Fuzhounese efforts to recast their social horizons beyond the limitations of “peasant life” in China. Transcending utilitarian questions of risks and rewards, she considers the overflow of aspirations in the Fuzhounese pursuit of transnational destinations. Chu attends not just to the migration of bodies, but also to flows of shipping containers, planes, luggage, immigration papers, money, food, prayers, and gods. By analyzing the intersections and disjunctures of these various flows, she explains how mobility operates as a sign embodied through everyday encounters and in the transactions of persons and things.

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