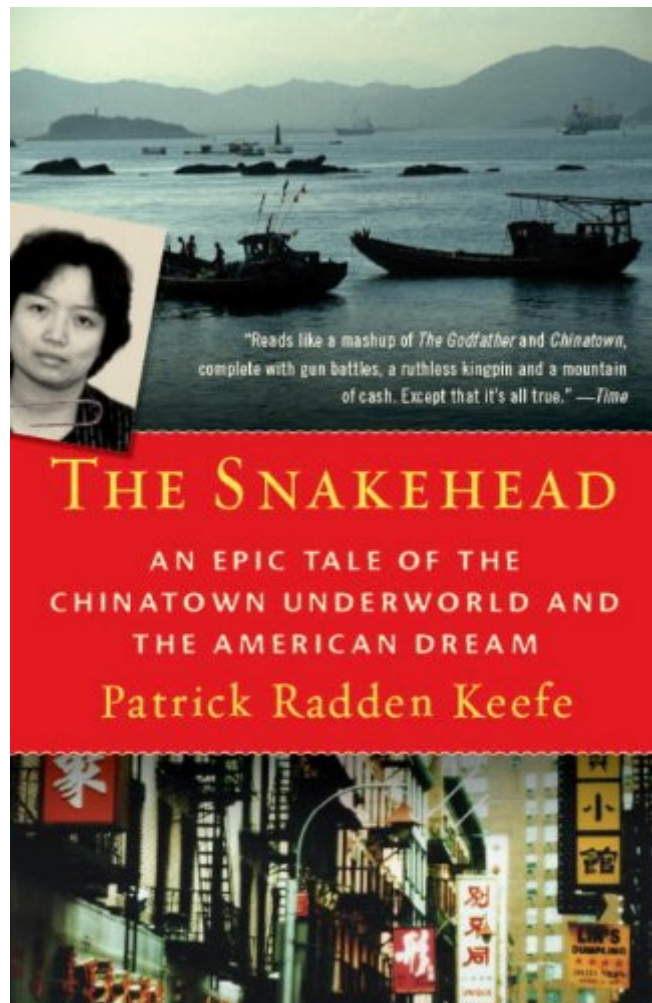


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# The Snakehead: An Epic Tale Of The Chinatown Underworld And The American Dream



## Synopsis

In this thrilling panorama of real-life events, Patrick Radden Keefe investigates a secret world run by a surprising criminal: a charismatic middle-aged grandmother, who from a tiny noodle shop in New York's Chinatown managed a multi-million dollar business smuggling people. Keefe reveals the inner workings of Sister Ping's complex empire and recounts the decade-long FBI investigation that eventually brought her down. He follows an often incompetent and sometimes corrupt INS as it pursues desperate immigrants risking everything to come to America, and along the way, he paints a stunning portrait of a generation of illegal immigrants and the intricate underground economy that sustains and exploits them. Grand in scope yet propulsive in narrative force, *The Snakehead* is both a kaleidoscopic crime story and a brilliant exploration of the ironies of immigration in America. From the Trade Paperback edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

When then-president Jimmy Carter reproached Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping with the latter's reluctance to allow his citizens the 'freedom of departure' from China, the latter famously responded, "Certainly, Mr. Carter. How many millions would you like?" This excellent book is the

story of how untold thousands -- and possibly millions -- of Chinese migrants, particularly from the rural coastal areas of Fujian province, have made their way from China to the United States, despite the fact that it's still hard for them to get official permission to leave and still harder for them to enter the United States legally than it once was. The starting point for the narrative and the discussion of the underlying issues is the misadventures of the passengers on the Golden Venture, which ran aground on a spur of land on Rockaway Beach in New York City, which drew everyone's attention to the magnitude of the illicit business of smuggling humans. Ten died; 300 landed or were rescued by local law enforcement -- people who up until then had had so little cause to use their handcuffs that they had to oil them to prevent them from rusting. Now they ran out of handcuffs when the decision was made to arrest the new arrivals. On the surface, the story that Keefe is telling is that of Sister Ping, the snakehead (or people-smuggler) of the title, who had helped finance the Golden Venture's voyage and who was owed smuggling fees by two of the hapless passengers. She's essentially a boring character -- a middle-aged, unremarkable woman with a single-minded focus on making money the best way she knows how.

In trying to think up one word to describe Patrick Radden Keefe's *The Snakehead* the only word that comes to mind is epic. Beginning with the wreck of the smuggling ship the Golden Venture, Keefe works his way backward charting the rise of Cheng Chui Ping, a woman who immigrated to America in the eighties and with her husband Cheung Yik Tak set up a human smuggling ring transporting people from the Fujian province of China to America for a fee. She earned so much money from her endeavors that she was able to set up her own money wiring service. There's more to it than that involving killers, with innocents and a myriad of law enforcement officials who were working against each other due to country borders and customs. There's a lot of issues raised with topics ranging from human rights violations in China (specifically the one child only policy that had a lot of people fleeing rural villages to avoid sterilization) to the rights of undocumented aliens living in America and their attempts at clemency. Personally like every good nonfiction novel the best thing Keefe does is present his work without over embellishing things with his viewpoint. Everything is presented in a gray with suppositions made upon deals that got murderers lenient sentences from American courts to the exploits of an American INS agent who worked to bring Ping to justice, embellishing stories he told and eventually being caught in Hong Kong with Honduran passports, a criminal in the system he had once enforced.

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