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Main content

Article Preview :

Gender and the South China Miracle: Two Worlds of Factory Women. By China Kwan Lee. California: University of California Press, 1998. 210 pp. ISBN 0-520-21127-8, \$16.95 (paper).

Gender and the South China Miracle is a rich comparative study of gender in two factories across the disciplines of sociological ethnography, labor relations, and women's studies. The book examines a Hong Kong-based enterprise, Liton. Pressured by labor shortages in Hong Kong and the relatively cheap labor in China, Liton moved part of its production to Xixiang (a town within Shenzhen) in 1986. Despite the fact that the two factories use the same technology, produce the same electronic components, and are owned by the same company, their management practices are distinctly different. Chi-ying is a twenty-two-year-old peasant's daughter from a northern province of China. Like many other young girls, she works at the Shenzhen factory, where management is described as harsh and controlling. Rules and punishments are a part of daily life inside the factory. On the other hand, inside Liton's Hong Kong plant, Yuk-ling, a forty-three-year-old working mother, presents a different story. Female workers...

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The two factories are owned by the same foreign corporation, they are located a few miles away across the northern border of Hong Kong, they produce similar products, and yet they could not offer more dissimilar worlds of labor. Whereas the women in Hong Kong participate in a management system characterized by "familial hegemony", the young women in Guangdong find an internal system of power based on regional politics and kin connections, or "localistic despotism". This fascinating comparative ethnography can be read at three different levels. The first is a rich descriptio
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