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Wen-chen Yu

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- 1 The international migration of labour has become a burning issue with multi-dimensional implications that are attracting wide attention, at local, national and transnational levels. Wherever migration occurs, from Mexican workers in the United States, to Egyptians in Saudi Arabia, to Poles in Germany, each example showcases how the cross-border movement of labour contests the embedded social, political and cultural structures and values of both the labour-sending and labour-receiving countries. Taiwan's rapid economic development over recent decades has inevitably led to its resorting to migrant labour. Dr. Lan Peichia's *Global Cinderellas* is a serious academic piece of work with touching stories that captures this episode of societal transformation presently taking place in Taiwan and its South-east Asian neighbours. This book is written on the basis of Dr. Lan's doctoral dissertation completed seven years ago at Northwestern University, Chicago, and her continuous postdoctoral research findings on this subject. The analysis is qualitative, based on years of immersion into migrant worker communities in Taiwan, interviewing workers and their Taiwanese employers, plus field trips to these migrants' homelands in South-east Asian countries such as the Philippines. Dr. Lan articulates her findings in a personal tone, bringing the readers closer to what she has observed—the conflict-laden world of migrant workers, agents and employers. Her informal approach, however, does not detract from her concern for and critical reflections on this very thorny topic. *Global Cinderellas* explores the interaction of a number of players crosscutting various social factors, such as gender, economic status, educational background, race and ethnicity in the contemporary labour migration market. Women are a notable group in this scenario. Combining constructivist, feminist and sociological approaches, Dr. Lan presents several paradoxical dilemmas facing female workers these days. On one side we see Taiwanese employers, particularly younger, well-educated females, struggling to break through the confinement of traditional family structures and ethics. Many

have the capacity, and most importantly, the ambition to manifest their capacity in the job market. In order to free themselves of conventional Confucian values (serving their parents-in-law) and to master household tasks, they look for a substitute from South-east Asia. This outsourcing, nevertheless, does not come to them easily. Taiwanese female employers have to constantly engage themselves in (re-)negotiation and (re-)confirmation of their roles and values vis-à-vis their children, male spouses, and often traditionally-minded parents-in-law. On the other side are the South-east Asian female employees leaving their families, using all sorts of channels and contracts to work in Taiwan, in the hope of making money to sustain their families back home, regardless of the loneliness, inhumane working conditions and challenges they must face working in a foreign land. Their efforts, however, are not always appreciated by their family members, as their behaviour contests the male's traditional role as breadwinner, and can cause struggles between men and women, and conventional and non-conventional family norms in their home countries. Taiwan female employers and South-east Asian female employees share many similarities in that they all yearn for modes of life different from what their traditional cultures and values tell them to follow. Yet these two groups of females also differ greatly in terms of the objectives or dreams they aim to achieve in life. Their approaches and their paths to fulfil that ambition also differ substantially. What is fascinating, in Dr. Lan's view, is that their respective dreams bring them together, across country borders, class barriers and ethnicities, to fulfil their needs through the employer-employee relationship. What is even more intriguing, as the author constantly reminds us, is that the place where this encounter occurs is an intimate, private haven commonly known as "home". This is no easy task. How does a Taiwanese female employer delegate part of her precious motherhood and womanhood duties to a nonfamily female from another, supposedly less developed country, while maintaining her status as a "good" mother, a loving wife and a qualified daughter-in-law in the eyes of her family members and outsiders? As Dr. Lan discovers, this requires clear, tactful compartmentalisation of tasks, living space and roles (often connoting negative, unfair treatment of "the other"), should the Taiwanese female employer wish to keep her status intact. For the female migrant worker, the question therefore is how to fulfil the assigned household tasks with professionalism, care and probably a little bit of "love" (as the working environment is "home" not elsewhere), without being "loved" by their employer's family members (e.g. husbands, children). That means, a maid is and should always be a maid. Dr. Lan compares these maids to "global Cinderellas" because they do not enjoy a high social status in Taiwan. However, the fact that they are in this economically better-off country also gives them greater access to modernity. Meanwhile, their "foreign nature" brings them closer to diaspora communities on the island. When off duty, they chat on mobile phones, try on fancy dresses, use available services, meet with people within expatriate communities, and perhaps enjoy a moment of vanity that they are unlikely to experience in their homeland, or in their Taiwanese employers' family. Apart from reporting on the lives of those directly involved in international labour migration, *Global Cinderellas* critically examines the labour-sending and labour-receiving countries' foreign labour policies and their rationales for taking a particular approach. There is *realpolitik*—a lot of it. For example, the Taiwan authorities from time to time use the acceptance or rejection of migrant workers from a specific country to negotiate the island's diplomatic relations with that particular country. This is not surprising as Taiwan, as a peripheral player in the international system, has long been contending its

legitimate statehood. While accepting migrant workers for purposes of economic and political expediency, the Taiwan government also exercises tight control over them. Policymakers' fear that too many migrants would disrupt this ethnically homogenous island country, lead to policy responses that in turn lead to unfair treatment of migrant worker that agitate human rights activists at home and abroad. Migrant workers themselves, ironically, are somehow hesitant to complain and claim their rights, for fear of losing their jobs. Overall, *Global Cinderellas* is an excellent case study on transnational labour movements. As this book concentrates on female migrant workers and their particular experiences working in Taiwanese households, it does not cover all the issues of migration as they exist in Taiwan. There are no detailed accounts of the experiences of male workers in other fields of work, such as construction, fishery and agriculture. Nor is there detailed coverage of female migrants in other industries. The author slightly touches upon workers from mainland China, who are culturally and socially closer to Taiwan's inhabitants than their South-east Asian counterparts. However, the political standoff between authorities across the Taiwan Strait results in certain policy discrimination against mainland Chinese workers. All of these aspects are highly relevant one to the other. Hence, this study calls for further efforts to complete the interesting stories that Dr. Lan Peichia has introduced in *Global Cinderellas*.