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Multinational Maids: Stepwise Migration in a Global Labor Market by Anju Mary Paul (review)

Maria Cecilia Hwang

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she spends little time developing this crucial contention, one which suggests complex struggles over identity and belonging within what would eventually become a ‘Malay’ countryside. Lees hints at these variances in occasional references to agricultural fairs, banditry, peasant rubber cultivation, Jubilee-celebrating foresters, and — most significantly — British-supported mass migration from the Netherlands Indies. But greater emphasis on rural dynamics would have enriched her investigation of views of empire from “other boats” (Ho 2004, p. 213), while perhaps refining her own contention that “social engineering [was] implicit in the British Empire” (p. 11). Nevertheless, Lees’ vigorous attention to small-town and plantation societies ensures that this book will remain an invaluable reference for years to come.

Geoffrey K. Pakiam

Regional Economic Studies Programme, ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, 30 Heng Mui Keng Terrace, Singapore 119614; email: geoffrey_pakiam@iseas.edu.sg.

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Multinational Maids: Stepwise Migration in a Global Labor Market. By Anju Mary Paul. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. xxix+386 pp.

This book is an important examination of contemporary international migration, as it presents a necessary and timely challenge to the prevailing paradigms of permanent settlement and binational approach to transnationalism. Recent estimates suggest that about two-thirds of international migrants are workers, most of whom are considered ‘low-waged’ and ‘low-skilled’, and are therefore barred from permanent residency in most destination countries.

In *Multinational Maids*, Anju Mary Paul offers a comparative analysis of the migration trajectories of Filipino and Indonesian domestic workers in what she calls “an age of multinational migration” (p. 289). This study is based on comprehensive qualitative data gathered from 2008 to 2015 and across multiple sites. Findings are drawn from 95 interviews with Filipino domestic workers in Hong Kong, Singapore and the Philippines; interviews with 44 Filipino domestic workers in Canada and the United States; and, finally, 649 and 615 surveys collected in Hong Kong and Singapore, respectively.

Previous scholars have noted the phenomenon of multinational migrations, not only among domestic workers in Taiwan and Israel but also among construction workers in the Middle East. However, Paul is the first to comprehensively theorize the factors that compel and enable this multi-country mobility. *Multinational Maids* establishes how Filipino and Indonesian domestic workers engage in “stepwise international labor migration”, which she defines as “the process by which capital- and information-constrained labor migrations accumulate migration-related capital of various kinds while working overseas, enabling them to eventually gain access to destinations that had been out of their reach and/or outside their awareness when they originally left their home country” (p. 10). Challenging the dominant assumption that migrant women are more likely to seek settlement than their male counterparts, Paul insists that access to permanent residency in the West is not the ultimate goal for stepwise domestic workers. While migrant Filipinas aspire to settle in Western countries such as Canada and the United States, migrant Indonesians aim to prolong their stay in destinations with better living and working conditions such as Hong Kong and Singapore before returning home.

The book’s organization lays out Paul’s theorizations of stepwise international labour migration. The first section of the book examines the structural context of domestic workers’ global migration. Focusing on both origin and destination countries, it analyses the expansion of the Philippines’ and Indonesia’s export of domestic workers

and illustrates how the globalizing of domestic-work migration is characterized by the “unevenness” (p. 18) of living and working conditions and barriers to entry in destination countries. This unevenness, according to Paul, compels domestic workers to pursue different stepwise migration trajectories based on their personal and subjective rankings of destinations and their ability to access these destinations.

The second part of the book focuses on the actors of stepwise migration and delves closely into the dynamics of stepwise migration trajectories of domestic workers. In this section, Paul establishes how these different trajectories are shaped by a broad range of factors, including not only by one’s ability to accumulate migrant capital but also by one’s life stage, family status, age and social network. Particularly illuminating in this section is Paul’s discussion of how migrant imaginaries and “‘sense’ of the world” (p. 155) shift with time and migration experiences, which in turn shape the geography of their stepwise migration. Paul also examines the struggles of accumulating capital that enable or stall domestic workers’ stepwise migration. Here, Paul makes an important observation that state-mandated human capital requirements have institutionalized stepwise migration. Finally, the last chapter in this section focuses on how migration intermediaries in stepping-stone destinations promote and shape stepwise migration, thus advancing scholarly analyses of the migration industry that largely focus on brokers in origin and destination countries.

The last section investigates the end road for stepwise migrants. Paul illuminates how upward geographic trajectory does not always result in upward socioeconomic mobility. She highlights how migrant Filipinos who have reached Canada and the United States instead face new sets of economic precariousness, racism and exclusion, while those who remain in Asia are able to channel their energy into mobility projects in their communities at home and abroad.

While Paul convincingly illustrates that we have entered an era of multinational migrations, situating her study in top destinations

for domestic workers raises the question of whether or not her analysis may be biased towards experiences that culminate in stepwise trajectory. Also posing a challenge to the applicability of stepwise migration in analysing the migration trajectories of many ‘low-waged’ and ‘low-skilled’ workers are studies that illustrate that migrants’ increasing reliance on intermediaries reduces their migration capabilities, which consequently may also limit their ability to reach aspired destinations. Nonetheless, this is an important book that not only challenges dominant paradigms in migration studies but, more importantly, invites further theorizations of the under-studied phenomenon of multinational migration.

Maria Cecilia Hwang

Chao Center for Asian Studies, Rice University, 6100 Main Street, MS-475 Houston, TX 77251-1892, USA; email: maria.cecilia.hwang@rice.edu.

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Mirroring Power: Ethnogenesis and Integration among the Phunoy of Northern Laos. By Vanina Bouté. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books and École française d’Extrême-Orient, 2018. 296 pp.

In her informative study of the Phunoy, a Tibeto-Burman group in northern Laos, French anthropologist Vanina Bouté shatters many generalized assumptions concerning ‘Zomian’ populations. Those used to include simplistic binaries such as upland versus lowland, Buddhism versus animism, state versus non-state. Instead, the case of the Phunoy reveals a non-linear history of “continual ethnogenesis” (p. 7), marked by varying relationships with external powers, by processes of adaptation and appropriation, and by internal differentiation and shifting identity discourses.

Since pre-colonial times, Phunoy oral history accounts suggest various levels of interaction with lowland powers such as Burmese, Lao and other Tai-speaking groups. In particular, relationships to the Lao kingdom of Luang Prabang and the Tai Lü polities of Sipsong