

***Asian Women and Intimate Work.*** Edited by Ochiai Emiko and Aoyama Kaoru. Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2014, 318 pp., ISBN 2213-0608.

Why have women, particularly in Asia, been always associated with intimate and domestic work? This seminal book, whose contributors are predominantly Asian, traces the historical construction of intimate work and its relation to the identity formation of Asian women. Situating their analysis against the social conditions that helped shape the position of women in East Asian societies, the contributors offer an interesting framework to see how women's roles and identities have changed over time. They particularly challenge the traditional Confucian view and ideal of East Asian women as "good wives and wise mothers," analyzing it as a result of a modern social formation where women's roles in the domestic sphere are seen as vital to producing responsible and productive citizens (alongside men as the productive other in the public sphere). Using a historical perspective, they also incorporate the global changes that saw the increased mobility of other Asian women and their participation in the performance of various kinds of intimate and domestic work in the more affluent East Asian countries. In particular, the latter part of the book discusses the migration experiences of women from the Philippines, Vietnam, China, and South Korea who have gone to Japan as rural brides, entertainers, and domestic workers and how they have come to shape and configure Japan's intimate spheres. The theoretical grounding of the studies provide for a nuanced re-reading of the phenomenon of the internationalization of reproductive labor, and analyzes how women have been shaped by labor, and vice versa. This sets the stage for an understanding of intimate work that distinguishes itself from Western concepts of intimacy, housework, housewifization, care and emotional labor.

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The chapters, which fall under three sections, are organized chronologically to illustrate how women's labor participation and social identities have changed over time. It covers the beginnings of a modern history of women and how they have countered traditional views imposed on them by the society. The first section, "Imagining Intimate Work," theorizes about "housewifization" and the construction of housewife work. It foregrounds the historical formation of housework in Dutch and Indian societies in the 19th and early 20th century.

The second section, "Multiple Faces of the Good Wife/Wise Mother" interrogates the traditional view of women based on Confucian ideals and argues that the ideological underpinning of the concept serves to utilize women as equal counterparts of men in the production of society. For example, in chapter three, "Troubles of the 'New Women' in the Emergence of Modern Korea," Suh Ji Young discusses the politics behind this traditional, Confucian ideal of women as a means to transform them into equal partners of men and motivate them to partake in the rebuilding of the nation. She argues that this concept is a product of modern undertakings in the creation of the "modern woman" vis-à-vis the "formation of the modern family and nation" (94).

Meanwhile, in chapter four, "Selling Modernity," Wu Yongmei traces how the Chinese communist state shaped the image of the modern woman by looking at calendar posters and magazine advertisements in the 1920s-1930s Shanghai, and contends that the creation of the image of the housewife was a product of the "modern capitalist consumer society" in the early years of the Republic of China. Zheng Yang continues the discussion on the changing image and role of the modern Chinese woman in chapter five, "The Gender Norms of Chinese Women in the Transitional Market Economy." She reflects on the impact of the transition to capitalistic and consumerist market on Chinese families, which created equal employment opportunities for both men and women.

The third section tackles other migration dynamics involving Southeast Asian women, who emigrate via two routes: as migrant brides or as domestic workers. Chapters in this section depart from the rhetoric of women as victims, and reveal that women exercise agency and control over their situations. In fact, their decision to migrate is, at times, a response to liberate themselves from the constraints (ie. economic, personal, and social limits) of their homes and communities. The discussions took into account the regional issues that drive labor migration, such as the hyperaging in Japan that increases the demand for caregiving. Responses from other Asian states have led to state-sponsored migration; for instance, Philippines and Indonesia have both signed Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA) with Japan, so that nurses and caregivers can be deployed in Japanese hospitals and nursing homes. However, there are other avenues where care work becomes unpaid, and migration by marriage opens another route by which Asian women perform reproductive labor within the ambit of the family. Hao Hongfang in chapter eight, “Commercially Arranged Marriage Migration,” illustrates that for some Chinese women marriage migration is a liberating force, as hypergamy (marrying someone of a higher social class) to Japanese men improved their economic and social status.

Overall, the book’s most significant contribution is the situated understanding of intimate work within the historical, social and economic conditions of Asian societies that configured women’s participation in the public and private spheres. The chapters lent voice to the narratives of women involved in these processes, and provided alternative readings of their experiences that do not follow the dominant understandings of women’s position and role in the domestic sphere. It sheds meaning into their lives as wives, mothers, daughters, migrants and laborers who are productive both in the domestic and public spheres, caring for themselves and their families and making and maintaining transnational ties between their origins and their host

societies. It especially highlights the importance of looking at these movements within a larger historical and ideological context, in order for us to understand how their individual decisions and actions serve as strategies to counter the dominant forces that structure their lives as women, as migrants, and as individuals.

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