Yue Yuen, a mammoth Taiwanese-owned factory in that sprawling city that is the world’s biggest manufacturer of footwear for brand names such as Nike, Adidas, and Reebok.

The way Yue Yuen is run and managed bears a resemblance not only to the legendary assembly-line mode of production pioneered by the Ford Motor Company, but also to a state-owned, socialist enterprise. For young migrants, Yue Yuen offers both stability and opportunities for upward mobility. Chang found that almost all the managers in this factory of 70,000 people, “from supervisors of single lines to the heads of whole factories, are rural immigrants who started out on the assembly line.” Its employees could expect to receive basic services and benefits based on a 13-grade hierarchical managerial system.

This chapter is an eye-opening experience, especially for those who believe that anything made in China is produced in sweatshops that ignore fair-labor standards and violate human rights.

But most of the book focuses on the factory girls themselves. Making ingenious use of quotes from Chunming’s diary, Chang documents the struggles the young woman went through upon entering the unfamiliar if not hostile world of corporate capitalism, and the steps in her decision to embrace an indigenous version of Max Weber’s Protestant ethic (e.g., “Benjamin Franklin’s Thirteen Rules of Morality” and Mary Kay’s Nine Leadership Keys to Success) in order to make it in the workplace. In tracing Min’s progress as she is promoted from assembly-line jobs to positions in the human-resources department, Chang seems to remind us that migrant women do not exist in a world of dead-end jobs: upward mobility is in fact an attainable dream.

In several chapters, Chang surprises the reader with stories of her own extended family's immigrant experiences, as if to juxtapose multiple and diverse voices, locations, and situations. Chang feels that she has a strong link to the factory girls because she herself left home after graduating from college and “lived abroad for fifteen years, going home to see my family once every couple of years, like the migrants did.” The average reader may find it difficult to appreciate her effort to draw parallels between historical memories and recent events as she recounts the story of her grandfather, one of China’s first professional mining engineers, who was trained in the United States in the early 1920s. These digressions are relatively minor, but sometimes disrupt the main flow of the book.

The great contribution of Leslie Chang’s book lies in its attempt to contextualize and broaden our understanding of how women migrants are reshaping relations and contemporary morality in rural and urban China. Researchers and students interested in “things Chinese” will find this book a wonderful resource and a most engaging read in which we hear the unfiltered voices of migrant women, who are too often either absent or underrepresented in scholarly works on gender and labor.

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