

Book Review

Factory Girls

Rarely does one get to read a book about ourselves, the place we live, the people we work with, the ever evolving mishmash that is collectively and unmistakably Dongguan. For those who call this place home, albeit a temporary one, this book invokes a reflection of the past with resonating sentiments.

With a vivid and inviting prose, Leslie Chang shows us Dongguan from an unusual perspective – through the eyes of migrant workers. By befriending Chunming, Min and others, she tells a compelling narrative of their struggles in a foreign world. She follows their ambitious struggles, from familiar places like Zhitong Talent Market and the South China Mall, to unfamiliar places like the Making Friends Club and the Assembly-line English School. With a journalist's attention to detail, she provides insightful observations on the harsh realities of the Wild West, with injustices so commonplace they are considered normal. The most appealing part of her writing, in my opinion, is what she does **not** write about. Faced with the most cynical, perverse, and ridiculous absurdities that would make anyone with a moral fiber facepalm himself into a concussion, she reserves judgment and tells it as it is. They are, after all, the rules of the jungle.

However, the book is not without its flaws. She embarks on a personal journey to discover her roots, and rambles on incessantly with irrelevant details, and tries to tie it into the main narrative by forcibly drawing tenuous parallels with the migrant girls. Her journey is interesting, but it belongs in a different book; hijacking the main story detracts from the reading experience. The time I spent reading 22% (28,000 out of 128,000 words, 3 out of 15 chapters) of the book, is time I wish I had back.

This book was published in 2008. An interesting and mostly enjoyable read, but nonetheless a historical anecdote, which is an attestation to the ever changing nature of Dongguan.

很难得有机会可以读到一本书，是关于我们自己，我们所生活的地方，工作的同事；一个不断进化的大杂烩，一个我们熟悉的东莞。对于许多把东莞称为家的人来说，即使是暂时的家，这本书勾起了许多过往回忆及共鸣。

本书的作者张彤禾用生动而引人入胜的笔调，用东莞外来工人的不寻常视角为我们展现了东莞独特的一面。通过与春明，敏和其他打工女孩建立友情，张彤禾叙述了一个关于打工女孩们如何在一个陌生的世界生存下来的扣人心弦故事。张彤禾跟随着他们的奋斗历程走遍各处，从熟悉的智通人才市场和华南摩尔，到陌生的交友俱乐部和流水线式英语学校。作者用记者对新闻细节的专注力为我们描述了一个犹如“狂野西部”的严峻现实世界，一个充满不公但人们又习以为常的世界。

在我看来，《打工女孩》一书中最吸引人的是作者忍住不写的部分。面对着那些恶意的，有悖常理又可笑的荒诞事情，对任何有最基本道德观的人都会瞋目结舌、大加挞伐的不公乱象，张彤禾保留了自己的意见，仅仅只是讲述故事的来龙去脉。毕竟，这就是“丛林生存法则”。

当然，这本书也并非无瑕疵。书中张彤禾开始她的寻根之旅，用了不少的篇幅叙说一些不相干的细节，然后牵强地想将打工女孩这一主题与她的寻根之旅联系起来。张彤禾的寻根旅虽然有趣，但不应该融合在这一本书里；因为这样就挟持了读者对打工女孩故事主线的注意力。我想要回我浪费在读寻根之旅那些章节的时间。

《打工女孩》这本书出版于 2008 年。它是一本有趣而让人回味无穷的书，但现在看来宛如历史故事，也正是东莞不断变化的发展历程的真实写照。