

REZENSIONEN

Kaye Broadbent, Michele Ford (eds.): Women and Labour Organizing in Asia. Diversity, autonomy and activism

ASAA Women in Asia Series, London, New York: Routledge, 2008, 174 S., GBP 75,00

This collection on women's labor activism across Asia consists of an introduction and nine case studies of the labor market in one specific Asian country and the role women play in it, respectively. In their introduction the editors explain that "women have become the new face of industrial labour – and of labour activism – (...) in all the most and least developed countries of Asia." Globalization, they say, "has shone a spotlight on male-dominated union organizations in the region and their failure to protect women's interests." (p. 1). The volume complements a rich body of scholarship on the informal economy and the by now familiar theme of the feminization of labor in the most recent wave of globalization. It uncovers the "similarities in women's experiences of union activism and the barriers that women labour activists face" (p. 8). All the chapters highlight female organizing strategies within and beyond unions in Asia. The first six country-specific case studies (on Indonesia, China, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Thailand) describe and discuss women's "separate organizing" (p. 5) within mainstream unions and other organizations, and mostly deal with specific organizing strategies used to establish "women-only structures" (p. 8) within these organizations. The three remaining chapters (on India, Korea, and Japan) showcase autonomous women's unions or organizations and the search for innovative organizational forms and women's representation.

A number of connecting themes come up throughout the book. One is the relationship between female labor activism and the respective national union movement in general. If the unions were historically "a part of the state apparatus rather than an independent vehicle for workers' interest" (p. 2), as was the case in Indonesia, Korea, and Malaysia, or were closely tied to political parties, as in India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh, these conditions not only severely limited the unions' ability to mobilize, but were also partly responsible for the fact that women's issues were hardly ever on the agenda. The editors assert that the "union movement worldwide has a deep tradition of anti-woman bias." (p. 2). Another dominant theme is the problem of religion and how it influenced female labor activism in a number of Asian countries. In their respective chapters the authors discuss the issue of Islam in Bangladesh and Indonesia and the prevalence of "patriarchal Confucian principles" (p. 3) in China, Japan, and Korea. Another issue which concerns the authors of several chapters is the impact of industrial restructuring in the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis. The cases of Thailand (p. 102, 109ff. in chapter 7) and Korea (p. 139, 145 ff. in chapter 9) demonstrate how the restructuring led to a deterioration of women's workers protection and to the emergence of women-only unionism. The recent phenomenon of alliances with non-union structures, such as NGOs, in a number of Asian countries (particularly prominent in the cases of Indonesia (p. 21), Southeastern China (p. 46), Malaysia (p. 62), Bangladesh (p. 87f.), and Korea (p. 146f.)) highlights one response to male-dominated unionism in Asia.

Regardless of the respective conditions in each country, the most important and central

thread is the realization that "a critical mass of women workers is vitally concerned with work-related issues and interested in actively pursuing these issues through mainstream mixed unions, women-only unions or non-union organizations such as NGOs." (p. 11). This is particularly articulate in Elizabeth Hill's chapter on the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India, in which the author asserts that "contrary to mainstream belief, women workers can be highly motivated and find the time to engage in strategies for work-life reform through their union." (p. 116). Kaye Broadbent's chapter on "Women workers and autonomous organizing" in Japan (p. 156ff.) comes to a similar conclusion, but this theme finds explicit expression in other chapters as well (China, p. 42, Thailand, p. 101). The authors of this volume largely dismiss the notion of "union apathy" (p. 116) among women workers, which has been used in previous scholarship to explain the labor movement's failure to organize women (*ibid.*).

Most chapters give a historical overview which is most useful for establishing a transnational image of Asian unionism and female labor activism. The major part of the book is as much about the national union movements in general, as it is about female labor activism and therefore provides only a general overview. Much of what is discussed in the first part of the book deals with separate organizing strategies within the mainstream national unions and is not gender-specific. Although it mentions a few prominent female figures (Lilis Mahmudah in Indonesia (p. 25), Aruni Srito and Wilaiwan Saetia in Thailand (p. 105ff.), Ela Bhatt in India (p. 118)), we hear few authentic voices and individual experiences of women workers in contemporary Asia. The few interviews with male and female union officials generally center on discussing the necessity of separate women's structures in unions and the obstacles to mobilizing women in general. Notable exceptions are interviews with "eight informants" on informal networks in China (p. 45), the interviews with Korean

unionist (p. 140f.) and the interviews with founding members of the Japanese women-only union *Onna Kumiai*. The book provides an overview and can serve as an introduction to the topic for economists, historians of the Asian labor movements, and scholars in the field of gender studies.

(Karin-Irene Eiermann)

Reimund Seidelmann, Andreas Vasilache (eds.): European Union and Asia. A Dialogue on Regionalism and Interregional Cooperation

Transformation, Development, and Regionalization in Greater Asia, Bd. 3, Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2008, 363 S., EUR 59,00

The *EU-Network of European Studies Centres in Asia (NESCA): A Research Dialogue* is a project launched in 2006 consisting of a series of conferences, workshops and related research on EU-Asian relations. The aim of the project is the widening and deepening of the research cooperation between the European research area, the Network of European Studies Centres in Asia (Nesca) and the European Studies associations in Asia. The book presented here is the fourth Volume in the *EU-NESCA: A Research Dialogue* Book Series and contains revised papers of workshops and conferences, and articles written for the book. This volume gives an overview of concepts and perspectives of regionalism and interregional cooperation with a focus on the interregional cooperation between Europe, Asia and the Asia-Pacific Region. Scholars from Asia, the Asia-Pacific Region and Europe combine a theoretical and conceptual approach with a strong empirical insight and explore the political, economic, security and cultural aspects of regionalisation processes and interregional cooperation. The Editors see the book as "one of many necessary steps for building a better common understanding and a new common interregional responsibility" (p.10). They think this is necessary because interregion-