



On the Move for Love: Migrant Entertainers and the U.S. Military in South Korea (Pennsylvania Studies in Human Rights)

Sealing Cheng

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Since the Korean War, *gijichon*—U.S. military camp towns—have been fixtures in South Korea. The most popular entertainment venues in *gijichon* are clubs, attracting military clientele with duty-free alcohol, music, shows, and women entertainers. In the 1990s, South Korea's rapid economic advancement, combined with the stigma and low pay attached to this work, led to a shortage of Korean women willing to serve American soldiers. Club owners brought in cheap labor, predominantly from the Philippines and ex-Soviet states, to fill the vacancies left by Korean women. The increasing presence of foreign workers has precipitated new conversations about modernity, nationalism, ethnicity, and human rights in South Korea. International NGOs, feminists, and media reports have identified women migrant entertainers as "victims of sex trafficking," insisting that their plight is one of forced prostitution.

Are women who travel to work in such clubs victims of trafficking, sex slaves, or simply migrant women? How do these women understand their own experiences? Is antitrafficking activism helpful in protecting them? In *On the Move for Love*, Sealing Cheng attempts to answer these questions by following the lives of migrant Filipina entertainers working in various *gijichon* clubs. Focusing on their aspirations for love and a better future, Cheng's ethnography illuminates the complex relationships these women form with their employers, customer-boyfriends, and families. She offers an insightful critique of antitrafficking discourses, pointing to the inadequacy of recognizing women only as victims and ignoring their agency and aspirations. Cheng analyzes the women's experience in South Korea in relation to their subsequent journeys to other countries, providing a diachronic look at the way migrant issues of work, sex, and love fit within the larger context of transnationalism, identity, and global hierarchies of inequality.

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