



Red Lights: The Lives of Sex Workers in Postsocialist China

Tiantian Zheng

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In China today, sex work cannot be untangled from the phenomenon of rural-to-urban migration, the entertainment industry, and state power. In *Red Lights*, Tiantian Zheng highlights the urban karaoke bar as the locus at which these three factors intersect and provides a rich account of the lives of karaoke hostesses. A career whose name disguises the sex work and minimizes the surprising influence these women often have as power brokers. Zheng embarked on two years of intensely embedded ethnographic fieldwork in her birthplace, Dalian, a large northeastern Chinese seaport of over six million people. During this time, Zheng lived and worked with a group of hostesses in a karaoke bar, facing many of the same dangers that they did and forming strong, intimate bonds with them. The result is an especially engaging, moving story of young, rural women struggling to find meaning, develop a modern and autonomous identity, and, ultimately, survive within an oppressively patriarchal state system. Moving from her case studies to broader theories of sex, gender, and power, Zheng connects a growth in capitalist entrepreneurialism to the emergence of an urban sex industry, brilliantly illuminating the ways in which hostesses, their clients, and the state are mutually created in postsocialist China. "

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