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Diaspora and Class Consciousness: Chinese Immigrant Workers in Multiracial Chicago (Studies in Asian Americans)

Shanshan Lan

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This book is an ethnographic study of the multi-linear process of racial knowledge formation among a relatively invisible population in the Chinese American community in Chicago, namely the working class. Shanshan Lan defines "Chinese immigrant workers" as Chinese immigrants with limited English language skills who work primarily at low-skill, blue-collar service jobs at the extreme margins of U.S. economy. The book moves away from the enclave paradigm by situating the Chinese immigrant experience within the larger context of transnational labor migration and the multiracial transformation of urban U.S. landscape. Through thick ethnographic descriptions, Lan explores Chinese immigrant workers' daily struggles to cope with the disjuncture between race as an American ideological construct and race as a lived experience. The book argues that Chinese immigrant workers' racial learning is not always a matter of personal choice, but is conditioned by structural factors such as the limitation of the Black and white racial binary, the transnational circulation of U.S. racial ideology, the negative influence of prevalent U.S. rhetoric such as multiculturalism and colorblindness, and class differentiations within the Chinese American community.

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