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*Globalization, Flexibilization and Working Conditions in Asia and the Pacific*, Edited by Sangheon Lee and François Eyraud, Geneva: ILO and Oxford: Chandos Publishing, 2008, 452 pp., ISBN 978-1-8433-4330-1.

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à la retraite). Cette transition brouille les seuils traditionnels des âges et donne naissance à une diversification croissante des trajectoires individuelles des vies qui deviennent plus incertaines et aléatoires avec la dissolution de l'encadrement normatif traditionnel, même si la liberté individuelle augmente. Un tel bouleversement exige une réflexion profonde sur les politiques appropriées pour adapter la prise en charge de ses effets en matière de formation tout au long de la vie, de transitions entre travail et autres occupations non marchandes, de protection sociale, et des rôles respectifs de l'État, de la collectivité et des individus dans une « nouvelle solidarité ».

Des éclairages forts opportuns sont donnés sur des problèmes aussi ardues à saisir pour formuler des réformes acceptables, comme la notion de précarité et des « nouveaux risques » (risques associés à l'accès à l'emploi pour les jeunes ou les « seniors », risques liés aux transitions multiples au cours de la vie professionnelle, risque de l'inadéquation de la couverture sociale pour les emplois dont la qualité est médiocre), ou comme la distinction qu'il importe à opérer entre quantité et qualité d'emploi. Ainsi, par exemple, l'ambivalence profonde de la solidarité familiale qui génère des contraintes multiples pour l'individu qui en est le bénéficiaire – psychologiques, morales, matérielles ou symboliques, qui sont peu compatibles avec l'aspiration à l'autonomie ou l'insertion sociale de l'individu ; le rôle de l'État dans une approche « libérale » qui souligne la responsabilité de l'individu dans l'investissement en soi (le capital humain) mais qui ignore les risques auxquels sont exposés les plus faibles en matière de formation, de parcours professionnel ou de protection sociale; et, enfin, la nouvelle configuration de l'État social – investisseur, régulateur et générateur de solidarités collectives, pour ne mentionner que ces quelques exemples.

Pour conclure, cet ouvrage mériterait une large diffusion pour son approche à la fois éclectique et pédagogique.

**Hedva Sarfati**

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**Globalization, Flexibilization and Working Conditions in Asia and the Pacific**

Edited by Sangheon Lee and François Eyraud, Geneva: ILO and Oxford: Chandos Publishing, 2008, 452 pp., ISBN 978-1-8433-4330-1.

This book is a collective work of several researchers who are trying to fill gaps in the literature concerning recent changes in employment conditions in Asia and the Pacific. They stress the importance of the common but often forgotten wisdom that “people see the world through the optic of their workplace.” The objective is to go beyond the traditional macroeconomic analysis of globalization and its impact on the labour market based primarily on average indicators, and to find out what kind of changes have taken place in the working conditions of individual workers in the context of the recent trends towards labour market reform and economic globalization. The main employment conditions analyzed in this book are employment status (contract type), wage/incomes (average wages, wage inequality and wage-related underemployment or poverty, labour cost); and, working time (work organization and related issues like work and family balance, health and safety, etc.).

There are eight national case studies and two crosscutting analyses. The selected countries represent the four waves of globalization that have occurred in Asia and the Pacific: Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, China and Vietnam. Two special chapters discussing the workers' right to organize in this region and evaluating labour laws are also included. All the studies included in this volume were carried out in accordance with standard research guidelines that helped identify common trends and issues, as well as differences across the countries. However, the lack of reliable data and analysis did not allow the benefits of this approach to be maximized. Even though several new surveys were made (China, Philippines), more work is needed to improve labour statistics in this region to provide more thoughtful analysis and more-grounded policy debates.

This book is organized into four parts. Three chapters of the first part address the debates on economic growth and social

protection in Asia and the Pacific. In the first chapter, Lee and Eyraud review recent market developments in the region and introduce a range of issues that will be addressed in the following chapters. They speak about employment diversification, informal employment, wage inequality, minimum wages and deregulation. What they aim to show is that even if the labour markets of the region seem to have recovered from the financial crisis in 1997, this process created a group of vulnerable workers in the formal and informal economies. Accompanying labour market reforms did no more than exacerbate their precarious situation. Lee and Eyraud underline the regional dimension of such a change in working conditions and call for regional-level debates and policy dialogue. In the second chapter, Kucera analyses statistical evidence on the relationship between freedom of association and economic performance in the Asia region, finding a positive correlation between them, and addresses the question of whether or not Asian countries can be considered as "exceptions." McCann in the third chapter develops the idea of the positive effect of labour regulation. McCann considers that labour rights extended to workers were enacted as part of a democratization process. That's why labour standards should be evaluated as serving distributive goals and not from a purely economic view. She does not agree with the widespread view that labour rights must be eroded to attract capital. On the contrary, she shows that many Asian countries have enacted comprehensive labour legislation, and reforms have been undertaken to extend protection to growing numbers of "non-standard" workers. The main problem here is failure to respect existing legislation within workplaces.

Part two is devoted to the investigation of developments in the three countries involved in the first wave of globalization: Australia (Campbell), Japan (Kubo) and the Republic of Korea (Lee and Yoo). These cases reveal that in these three countries, the labour market flexibilization reforms resulted in an increase in non-standard employment. Thus the key policy question is 'how to realize an economically sustainable and socially acceptable balance between flexibility and job quality' as well as security.

In part three, three of the South Tigers are examined (Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand). Severely hit by the financial crisis in 1997, the labour markets of these countries have had difficulties recovering and showed high levels of unemployment, underemployment and a sharp rise in informal employment. In Chapter 7, Widarti reviews policy developments and related debates on employment conditions, particularly on minimum wages, employment protection and social security. He illustrates the difficult situation of governments and the social partners. In Chapter 8, Sibal, Amante and Tolentino review globalization and its impact on the world of work in the Philippines. They present a pessimistic picture noting that the capacity for job creation has been weakened, job quality has diminished in terms of wages and security, and non-standard employment has grown. The authors analyze those developments on the basis of new surveys of workers combined with case studies. In Chapter 9, Siengthai looks into the changes in the employment structure in Thailand. She demonstrates that in the context of an increase in unemployment after the financial crisis, the agricultural and urban informal sectors have played the role of "shock absorbers" or "buffers against unemployment." She also provides an overview of recent policy measures aimed at improving labour market institutions (social security and minimum wages) and active labour market policies. She also gives a review of existing empirical studies on the working conditions of vulnerable workers (agriculture, home-based work, "non-employees," subcontracting) and underlines that it is important to extend the coverage of labour and social protection for their benefit.

Two transition countries, China and Vietnam, are studied in Part four. These countries have several common characteristics such as increasing labour mobility from rural to urban sectors, high rates of informal urban economy employment, employment restructuring in state-owned enterprises (SOEs), and government control of the labour cost factors to maintain their cost advantage under competitive pressures. In Chapter 10, Chen and Hou speak about dual tasks of flexibilization (mainly for SOEs) within China. The authors analyze working conditions in

enterprises with different types of ownership and between migrant and non-migrant workers. They show the striking difference in working conditions between workers in the private sector, in SOEs and migrant workers. Chapter 9 touches upon working conditions in Vietnam. Dao reviews recent policy developments and labour market outcomes. The author underlines the role of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in advancing employment conditions among the subcontractors of multinational companies. He stresses the need for revision of the labour laws to cover employment security and equality issues.

In sum, this book is a complex picture of changes in employment conditions that do not fit well into the stereotypical vision of the world of work in the context of globalization. For example, one can learn how countries that used to be the key beneficiaries of globalization are becoming the “victims” of its next wave. The book does not suggest that poor employment conditions allowing stronger competition are necessary preconditions for globalization. Rather, the book raises questions with policy implications. However it does not offer any satisfactory answers due mostly to the lack of reliable data mentioned above. That’s why new research is needed to allow a deeper understanding of the world of work in Asia.

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### **Understanding Labour and Employment Law in China**

By Ronald C. Brown, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 332 pp., ISBN 978-0-521-19148-7.

Since its rapid transition from a planned economy to a socialist market economy started in the late 1970s, China’s actions have raised numerous questions regarding labour and social rights as well as the capacity of the Communist Party to justify and renew itself. Throughout this transition, China has repositioned its economic development from being predominantly based on agriculture and State-owned Enterprises (SOEs), to a labour-intensive economy specializing in industrial sectors such as textiles, electronics

and mining, making it the new “workshop of the world.” This fantastic development raised issues not only concerning the competitive pressures it exerts on the global economy, but also regarding the rights of Chinese workers who have, in some cases, responded with violent protests. This led China’s political powers to implement a series of reforms, beginning with the 1994 Labour Law, that progressively gave Chinese workers an almost complete set of rights, remedies and forums to use regarding labour contracts, labour disputes and collective bargaining. Ronald C. Brown’s book tries to make sense of this series of reforms and its main objectives are trying to understand workplace regulations and the legal environment in China. Specifically, the book focuses on the recent developments of the labour and employment laws put in place between 1994 and 2008 and centres on the following question: “With the adoption of a succession of new labour laws in the country, how are China’s workplaces regulated?”

Brown’s book is divided into seven parts. The first part, “Understanding China’s regulation of the workplace,” introduces us to China’s labour and employment law developments and to the architecture of the juridical environment. Brown argues that these new forms of regulation are a result of both internal and external pressures. Until now, it has had an uneven impact on Chinese workers: regional differences tend to be strong and the rapid economic transition has created new “classes” of workers, such as the migrant worker and his counterpart, the urban worker. Furthermore, the implementation and enforcement of various laws and settlements is subject to regional differences. Even though the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security – a so-called “Super Ministry” – is in charge of the supervision of social security and legislation for urban, rural and government workers, a multitude of forums are devoted to the enforcement of labour regulations (local and regional bureaus, Supreme People’s Court, Labour Arbitration Commission, etc). Therefore, the regulations depend on regional interpretations and are subject to major divergences (p. 12).

The second part of the book deals with employment relationships legislation in China. The legal definition of the employee/employer