

Migration Frontier of Filipino Women: Ethnic Relations of Filipina Domestic Helpers with Chinese Employers in Hong Kong

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Introduction

Migration of one ethnic group, in any form, often entails an encounter with another and thus creates a new ethnic relationship. It is also true in the case of the Philippines and its adjoining area, and ethnic relations there have often been encouraged and forged by migration in the course of history. One example of this is the successive migration of Christian ethnic groups from the north to the south of the country, where the majority were Muslims, beginning in the late nineteenth century under the Spanish regime [Che Man 1990 : 23]. Another example concerns the ethnic relations of the Bajau Laut, the permanently boat-dwelling fishing groups, with the other Sama-speaking peoples ashore in nineteenth-century Semporna [Sather 1984]. In the former case, the migration of Christian Filipinos encouraged their encounter with the Muslim counterparts and led to their present-day ethnic conflict based on religious difference.¹⁾ Migration does not always lead to conflict between the ethnic groups involved, and in the latter case, the Bajaus developed symbiotic patron-client relationships with the shore-dwelling groups in the trade and exchange domain of their nomadic life by placing themselves under the protection of powerful leaders in their anchorage sites [*ibid.* : 13–15].

These two cases may represent the two typical forms of ethnic relations following migration : the former, conflict ; the latter, symbiosis. In most cases, ethnic relations take various forms between these two extremes ; and it depends on the particular situation, conditions, and power-relations of ethnic groups where they find equilibrium. In this light, here in this paper, I aim to examine how actual ethnic relations can be balanced between the two poles of conflict and symbiosis by focusing on the emergent relationships based on case studies. For this purpose, I take up the cases of recent Filipina migration as domestic helpers to Hong Kong and illustrate the types of ethnic relations they develop with Chinese employers.²⁾ I would especially like to explain how they tend

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1) On the history of Christian-Muslim relations in the Philippines, see, for example, Bauzon [1991], Che Man [1990], Gowing [1988] and Majul [1973].

2) The following discussions on their ethnic relations are mainly based on the author's observations during the fieldwork in Hong Kong in July-August of 1992, 1993, and August-September of 1995. During the first fieldwork in 1992, I randomly interviewed Filipina migrants particularly in their casual gatherings in public ↗

to attain balanced relationships in the course of mutual adjustment as well as the form and characteristic of them by showing the conditions under which the two ethnic groups interact in a particular situation, and would also like to consider the effect of their emergent relationships on their migration in turn.

Filipina Migration to Hong Kong

The Filipina migration to Hong Kong began in the mid-1970s. It started with the hiring of approximately one thousand Filipinas by expatriates in Hong Kong [French 1986 : 85]. The Filipinos' pre-eminent English ability among Asians is considered to have encouraged their employment by expatriate families who needed domestic helpers. The demand for Filipina domestic helpers later spread to the majority group, the Chinese, during the economic boom of Hong Kong as one of the New Industrial Economies in Asia in the 1980s. Since then, this demand for them has continued to grow among the Hong Kong Chinese at an increasing rate every year (see Table 1).

Table 1 Number of Filipina Domestic Helpers, by Year

1975	1,097	1985	24,955
1976	1,684	1986	27,029
1977	2,916	1987	34,433
1978	5,405	1988	41,700
1979	8,242	1989	52,863
1980	11,759	1990	63,643
1981	17,759	1991	75,670
1982	20,120	1992	89,140
1983	24,716	1993	105,408
1984	22,989	1994	121,000

Source : Hong Kong Immigration Department

Thus, it was not until the demand for domestic helpers became common among the local Chinese that Hong Kong actually developed into an established destination for Filipina migrants seeking employment as domestic helpers. The practice of employing domestic helpers indeed

spaces on Sundays, and came close to a group of people from Aurora Province in Luzon Island with whom I spent most of the time on their days off. I could closely observe their Sunday activities by participation as well as getting information on their daily life through my conversation with them. I owe much to them for the vital information they provided on the Filipinas' lives as migrants in Hong Kong, although I alone am responsible for any errors of fact and interpretation in the present work. I also obtained general information on working conditions of Filipina helpers and the cases of contract breach by Chinese employers from the several NGOs based in Hong Kong. In my second fieldwork in 1993, I concentrated on interviews with Chinese employers and also stayed with an employer's family of a Filipina helper for an intensive participant observation. The follow-up research was conducted in 1995 to update the data, but most of the personal data and information in this report are based on my fieldwork in 1992 and 1993. The language used in conversation with my informants was mostly English, except in some interviews with Filipinas in my research in 1995.

existed in the British colonies in Asia from the nineteenth to early twentieth century,³⁾ but it was limited to wealthy families in the colonial social strata, and it was not common for the ordinary middle-class Chinese to have a helper at home until the 1980s. The development of demand for domestic helpers among the middle-class Chinese is considered to be an effect of socioeconomic change in Hong Kong during the economic boom. One aspect of such change is the increased participation of women in the labor force in the local economy. Partially as a result of this, traditional women's roles have been affected and many domestic helpers are needed to substitute for Chinese women in their roles of house-keeper or care-taker of children or old parents.⁴⁾

This demand was met by foreign migrant workers from the developing countries in Asia, such as Filipinos, Thais, and Indonesians, who agreed to work for the minimum wage in the Hong Kong labor market. Among others, Filipinas have quickly become the major force to meet this demand for helpers. In fact, they almost monopolize this job niche, representing more than 90% of the total population of foreign domestic workers.⁵⁾ One apparent reason for this virtual monopoly is that the Philippines has more migrant candidates than the other Southeast Asian countries; but the other important reason from the perspective of Chinese employers is the Filipinas' higher English ability and adaptability to work in the urban environment, based on their generally higher educational background compared with other nationals. Although I cannot present any statistical data concerning the educational background of Indonesian helpers, the educational attainment of Thai helpers can be compared with that of Filipinos according to the survey report on foreign domestic helpers in Hong Kong conducted by the Asian Migrant Workers Centre [AMWC 1991]. Of the 321 Thai respondents, the vast majority (50.8%) have only primary level education, 26.2% secondary, 20.6% tertiary level, and no degree-holders are reported; while among the 1,720 Filipinos, only 1% have primary level education, 32.6% secondary, 31.7% tertiary, and as many as 28.7% are degree-holders [*ibid.*: 15]. For communication with their employers, almost all Filipinos (98.7%) speak English; but only 29.3% of Thais are reported to communicate in English, while as many as 48.2% of them are more fluent in Cantonese, the local Chinese dialect [*ibid.*: 19]. The relative linguistic similarity between Cantonese and Thai is considered to be the reason why most Thais gain command of the local language. However, despite the well-known fact that Thais are generally more fluent in Cantonese, Filipino helpers are more popular than Thai helpers among the local Chinese employers.

3) For historical information on domestic helpers in British colonies in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, see Gaw [1988].

4) On the changing patterns of gender roles and household structure in the past few decades in Hong Kong, see, for example, Lee [1992]. Lee indicates the increased overall participation of women in the labor force based on the data from population census statistics in Hong Kong, that is, from 43.6% in 1976 to 51.2% in 1986 [*ibid.*: 2]. However, the actual rate is probably more than the statistics show, because not a few people are trying to conceal their wives' income in order to evade taxation. I also do not agree with his remarks based on his research that, even today, people rarely tend to purchase such services as domestic help or baby-sitting from the market and rather depend on their traditional kin networks for such assistance [*ibid.*: 29]; if that were the case, it would not be possible to explain the rapidly increasing demand for foreign domestic helpers as is indicated in the number of Filipina migrants in Hong Kong.

5) According to the survey report by the Asian Migrant Workers Centre, as of April 1991, Filipinos constitute 90.2% of the total registered population of foreign domestic workers in Hong Kong [AMWC 1991: 9], and, basically, this rate does not seem to have changed since then.

The reason for this is probably the high evaluation of English ability in Hong Kong society. As a center of international trade and finance-related business in Asia, English language ability is a crucial factor, together with educational attainment, in determining one's occupational status and potential for upward mobility for local Chinese. Thus, Chinese employers, most of who belong to the middle to upper class in the Hong Kong social strata, often have no problem in communication in English with their foreign domestic helpers and do not particularly need to choose helpers fluent in their first language. In addition, among middle-class parents, the English education of children at an earlier stage is becoming a considerable concern these days, and those who need domestic helpers mainly as baby-sitters for their children⁶⁾ often prefer Filipinos, considering that their children can learn to speak English in their daily conversation with a helper from the earliest stage of their life. For employers and prospective employers who can hardly speak English, there are many practical English schools with a specific purpose of teaching the necessary expressions for giving directions to foreign domestic helpers. The fact that these schools are becoming popular suggests that Filipinos are more often chosen than other Asian helpers even among Chinese who cannot speak much English.

The Filipina migration to Hong Kong is part of a massive labor out-migration from the Philippines that began in the mid-1970s. The Philippine government initiated an overseas employment program for its nationals in 1974 in order to redress the imbalance of international payments and to deal with the unemployment problem in the domestic economy. This program was introduced only as a temporary measure, to be phased out as the national economy gradually recovered. However, the depressed national economy failed to generate the expected reversal of unemployment or underemployment in the domestic market, and international labor migration became a widely accepted survival strategy for Filipino families all over the country.⁷⁾ In fact, international migration has now grown to be a self-expanding socioeconomic system in the Philippines to the extent that it is difficult even for the government to exercise effective control over the outflow of population.

Since the late 1970s, Filipinos, both men and women, legally or illegally, have found various job niches in Asia, the Pacific, the Middle East, Europe, North America, and even in some countries in Africa. As the demand for overseas work has increased, private agencies which mediate between the Filipino job seekers and foreign employers have also proliferated, channeling the work force to the many countries of destination. Their occupational status has grown in variety from the professional or skilled worker such as nurse or engineer to the unskilled worker like construction laborer or domestic helper [Philippines, DLE 1995]. Currently, about 4.2 million Filipinos are considered to be engaged in some form of migrant work in more than 130 countries abroad, accounting for 6 to 7% of the national population of about 66.89 million.⁸⁾ In other words, it is estimated that there is

6) About the practice of hiring Filipina helpers as baby-sitters, I will explain more precisely later.

7) For a brief history of recent development of Filipino migrants, see Cariño [1992: 6]; from the perspective of national policy on overseas employment, see Asis [1992: 70-77]. As studies focusing on the household strategy and Filipino migration in general, see, for example, Findley [1987], Root [1987] and Trager [1988].

8) It is difficult to know the precise number of Filipino migrant workers abroad since many of them are undocumented, including illegal migrants. I can only present the estimated number of 4.2 millions cited in ↗

at least one migrant worker in every seven households who probably supports several other members of the extended family. In this situation, domestic work has become one of the easiest and most preferred jobs among women, and Filipinas have found Hong Kong relatively attractive in terms of salary and working conditions compared to other destinations, especially recently, as they have become more aware of the possible trouble awaiting foreign domestic helpers in other countries in Asia.⁹⁾

Ethnic Relations between the Chinese and Filipinos

After almost two decades since Filipina migration to Hong Kong began, the Filipinos have quickly grown to be the second largest ethnic group next to the host Chinese. As of June 1995, the total Filipino population of 137,000 accounts for one third of entire foreign community of 415,000, and represents about 2.2% of the 6,189,800 total population in Hong Kong (Statistics by Hong Kong Immigration Department). As their number has grown, their relationship with the Chinese also seems to have grown stable. The ethnic relationship of a migrant group with their host community is deeply affected by their socioeconomic status in the host society, since it determines their general image in the eyes of the majority group. In the case of the Filipina migrants in Hong Kong, their socioeconomic status is largely conditioned by the legal regulations on their jobs and visa status as well as the actual demand for the Filipino work force in the Hong Kong labor market.

The legal status of Filipina migrants is mainly determined by the Standard Employment Contract, which roughly stipulates the terms for the employment of foreign domestic workers. According to this, domestic helpers normally stay with and work for their employers on a two-year contract, which can be extended every two years with the agreement of both parties; and they are entitled to at least one day off every week as well as public holidays in Hong Kong. They also have

the white paper by the Department of Labor and Employment [Philippines, DLE 1995: 2]. As for the total population of the Philippines, the formal figure of 66.89 millions as of 1994 given by the National Statistics Office is a projection based on the 10% sample test. Errors within a certain range concerning the percentage of migrants in the national population are thus unavoidable. However, irrespective of the precise number of migrant workers, their influence on the national economy in terms of remittances is obvious: in 1994, the total amount of their remittances through formal channels of bank amounted to US\$ 2,630.11 million, which accounts for 3.97% of the GDP and 19.58% of the total exports from the Philippines of the same year [*ibid.*: 13]. Considering that a substantial amount is remitted through informal channels, the actual total amount of remittances is estimated as much as to be 35% higher than the official figure [Vasquez 1992: 51]. The amount of remittances has recently increased sharply and it is reported to have reached 4.7 billion US\$ in 1995 in the local newspaper ("OCW dollar remittances hit record high: Reach \$4.7 B in 1995" by Mario Casayuran, *Manila Bulletin*, February 3, 1996).

- 9) The execution of a Filipina helper, Flor Contemplacion, on the allegedly false charge of double murder of another Filipina helper and her 4-year-old ward in Singapore on March 17, 1995 was a profound shock for all Filipinos. Similarly, the case of a 16-year-old Filipina helper, Sarah Balabagan, gave a sharp warning to many prospective Filipino migrants seeking jobs abroad. She was sentenced to death on September 16, 1995 in the United Arab Emirates for the killing of her 85-year-old employer, allegedly in self-defense, who, she claimed, had raped her at knife-point. Although her death sentence was later commuted to one year's imprisonment with 100 lashes and US\$ 41,000 blood money, this incident strongly impressed on Filipinos the possible danger of working in an Asian country with a different culture and a particularly strict penal code.

the right to paid leave for up to a week once a year. Employers are obliged to pay the negotiated amount of salary, which is usually determined in accordance with the official minimum wage, and supply their domestic helpers with free meals and private sleeping quarters.

The other legal regulations which affect the Filipinas' status are the immigration rules. The domestic helper's visa is issued only after the employment contract is presented to the immigration authorities in advance of the migrant's entry into Hong Kong, and is usually valid for two years in accordance with the normal employment term. The helper must leave immediately for her country after the contract expires unless she renews it. If the contract is canceled or terminated before the usual term of two years, the domestic helper can be allowed to enter a new contract with another employer and stay in Hong Kong only when the helper is not found responsible for the cancellation or termination of her contract. Otherwise, she is obliged to leave Hong Kong within two weeks after her contract is terminated. This decision is usually left to the discretion of an individual immigration officer, and very often, as I will explain more precisely later, Filipinas must leave Hong Kong when their contracts are canceled. The domestic helper's visa, in other words, is designed to be valid only for the period while the migrant is actually working for a specific employer, and to prohibit helpers from changing employers.

In addition, it is generally difficult for Filipinos to get jobs other than domestic work in Hong Kong. In reality, however, Filipinas do not always work as domestic helpers. Some of them are asked to do jobs other than domestic work by employers who have their own business and expect their helpers to work for the business aside from the domestic work. This is a breach of the contract, which is designed only to meet the need for domestic work, but it is actually quite common, especially among the traditional Chinese merchants. Filipinas are often seen engaged in sales work at various stands and shops all over Hong Kong. Some agree to illegal arrangements to engage in totally different jobs within the nominal category of domestic work at the time of contract before they enter Hong Kong. Thus, some Filipinas take secretarial jobs in offices, while others even work as entertainers at bars in the tourist area. These Filipinas often receive a little higher salary than the minimum wage of legal domestic helpers, but it is still much lower than that of Hong Kong residents in the same jobs. In any case, the way is generally closed for Filipinas to take better jobs than domestic work with the same working conditions as Hong Kong residents. This is not only because of the general legal situation, which makes it difficult for a foreigner to get a working visa, but also because of the labor market situation, in which Asian workers from developing countries are basically expected to fulfill the demand for cheap labor and Filipina migrants are mobilized as a versatile labor force in the formal name of domestic helper. Hence, in general, there is little chance for Filipinos to find better job niches where they can enjoy the same level of salary as Hong Kong residents, although there are exceptional cases of professionals or white collar employees working at multinational enterprises.

On the other hand, as I have mentioned, the job of domestic helper has been established almost as an exclusive ethnic niche for the Filipinos. Filipinas are in great demand in this specific job category, and the demand is steadily increasing. This is mainly because of the growing dependence on the labor of foreign domestic helpers on the part of the Hong Kong Chinese, and this is particu-

larly so for nuclear families with both husband and wife working outside the home. A survey report on the Filipina domestic helpers suggests that the majority of their employers, including about 30% of expatriates, are nuclear families in the middle or upper income bracket; more than half are either professionals, skilled workers, or white-collar employees with one or two children; and half of the all employers' households have two income earners [AMWC 1991: 40, 51-52]. These results roughly confirm my observation that double-income office workers in their twenties and thirties tend to depend on the domestic helpers' labor most of all when they need baby-sitters for their children. Since office workers, unlike business owners, have to leave their children while they are at work, they depend on foreign domestic helpers who work almost exclusively as baby-sitters in order to reconcile their double-income life with child-rearing. Some of them even admit that, after a few years of reliance on domestic helpers, they can no longer maintain their life without these helpers. Thus, the demand for Filipina domestic helpers, at least for the time being, seems unlikely to decrease.

Under these legal-economic circumstances, there is actually a clear tendency for the Filipinos to concentrate in the single occupational status of domestic helper in Hong Kong society, which results in an ethnic group consisting almost only of women, the majority of them in their twenties and thirties.¹⁰⁾ This gender-occupational structure naturally affects the image of the Filipinos in the eyes of the host Chinese, which is almost inseparable from one of foreign domestic helpers working at the minimum salary in the Hong Kong labor market. Thus, the Filipinas are generally viewed and categorized by the host Chinese as a group of poor migrants who occupy the lowest socioeconomic status in the hierarchy of Hong Kong society. The anthropological truism also applies here, and the prejudice against an ethnic group is intensified when that group is viewed as comprising people of low economic status [Myrdal 1972: 75]. The Chinese seldom try to develop any personal relationships with the Filipinas who work as domestic helpers beyond the necessary relationship with one of them as an employer. In my research, I could find no Chinese who personally associated with Filipinos aside from being involved as employers, except in the rare cases of Filipinos who are work colleagues of the Chinese and not domestic helpers, or the Chinese-Filipinos who emphasize their Chineseness over their Filipino identity.

Accordingly, the Filipinas also do not generally try to mingle with the Chinese beyond the minimum level necessary to earn their living by working as domestic helpers for specific employers. Most of the Filipina domestic helpers have a weekly day off on Sundays, when they can enjoy their personal activities away from the work domain of their migrants' life. Many of them go to a church of their chosen denomination, get together with their friends in charge-free public open spaces, and go to a shopping mall where they can buy Philippine products or to other inexpensive supermarkets and department stores. Many gatherings of Filipinas can be seen around churches, inexpensive shopping malls, and big open spaces on their holidays; and it is clear that they never interact with Chinese in their private life. Every church to which Filipinos go is officially said to be open to everyone irrespective of ethnicity or nationality; however, some churches are virtually supported by

10) According to research by the Asian Migrant Workers Centre, as much as 83% of the 1,720 Filipina respondents working as domestic helpers were in their twenties and thirties [AMWC 1991: 11].

entirely Filipino congregations, and many others have English services mainly for non-Chinese, when often the majority of the participants are Filipinas. There are also churches where most of the services are given in Tagalog, and often not only the congregations but also the church people are all Filipinos. In this way, the Filipinas tend to keep to themselves in their activities in the private domain and rarely try to develop any other relationship with the Chinese. Almost all the Filipina helpers whom I interviewed have no Chinese acquaintances beyond the people in the work domain, such as employers and their family members or relatives.

The Filipino-Chinese relationship in Hong Kong, therefore, is the one of mutual segregation in which the two ethnic groups interact only in a specific socioeconomic domain in which they depend on each other from necessity, aside from general interactions such as those between vendors and customers at the market place.¹¹⁾ In other words, their ethnic relationship involves a boundary which limits the occasions for interaction between the two groups and keeps them away from each other in most of their activity domains. Hence, the one and only significant channel through which interactions occur is their face-to-face relationships as employers and domestic helpers; and, since this is the only channel through which the two ethnic groups interact in their mostly segregated life, the type of relationships they develop within the employer-employee framework inevitably affects their inter-group relationship.

Employer-Domestic Helper Relationships

The employer-domestic helper relationship between Chinese and Filipinos is based on inequality that stems from its legal constraints. As I have mentioned, domestic helpers' right to choose their employers is strictly limited by the immigration rules, while employers enjoy the freedom to dismiss their helpers at any time, for virtually any reason. Because of this virtual freedom of employers to cancel their contracts, they can exercise effective control over their helpers by covertly, or sometimes even overtly, threatening dismissal. Needless to say, Filipina migrants have to remit money to support their families in the Philippines. In addition, many of them borrow money from various sources to cover the expenses for the contract before they arrive in Hong Kong.¹²⁾ This means that they have strong reasons to try to maintain their work contracts even under unfavorable circumstances. Thus, the employers' right to freely dismiss their helpers tends to make Filipina helpers submissive to their employers and resigned to unfavorable treatment.

The other reason for the advantageous position of employers over their helpers is that the Standard Employment Contract contains no penal clauses for breach of the contract. It is difficult for helpers to control their employers by legal sanctions but, of course, not completely impossible for helpers to protect their right to work; for example, as I have mentioned, domestic helpers can stay

11) This extreme mutual segregation is reminiscent of the plural society noted by Furnival in the colonial East Indies [Furnival 1944: 446-447].

12) According to a survey by the Asian Migrant Workers Centre, for example, of the 1,250 Filipina respondents who got jobs through agencies, almost 50% borrowed money from various sources for agency fees. Those who managed to cover their expenses personally only account for some 17% [AMWC 1991: 34].

and work for another employer when their contracts are canceled if they are not responsible for the cancellation. The cases in which helpers are not considered responsible for the termination of their contracts are: (1) financial difficulty on the part of the employer, (2) death of the employer, (3) emigration of the employer to another country, and (4) grave abuse or violation of the contract [Tellez 1993: 61–62]. If the case is judged to fall into one of these categories, the helper is allowed to stay in Hong Kong to take up another contract. However, each case is left to the discretion of an individual immigration officer; and it is often difficult in the most serious cases, such as (4), to prove the employers' abuse or violation of the contract. Therefore, such cases are often handled to the disadvantage of helpers.

One way in which a helper can protect her rights against an employer's breach of the contract is by means of a legal suit. Yet, in that case, the migrant has to support herself without a job during the probably prolonged trial in Hong Kong, which is usually impossible for a Filipina migrant who has no source of income other than that from her employer. However, there are now many NGOs to help and support Filipino and other foreign workers with their litigation, and actually many serious cases have been brought to court. Still, many Filipinas are reluctant to fight their employers, since there is no guarantee of their winning, and tend to be resigned to unfavorable treatment.

Coupled with their disadvantage in regard to an employer's breach of contract, the Filipinas are placed at further disadvantage by the lack of stipulation with regard to the working hours and the type of the work of the domestic helper in the Standard Employment Contract. According to the research by Cheung, almost 50% of Filipina helpers hired by Chinese usually work for 15–16 hours a day, 28.7% for 11–14 hours [Cheung 1992: 15]. Some Filipinas have to do some housekeeping jobs even on their holidays, before going out in the morning and after coming back in the evening. They are even required to do other jobs aside from their domestic work, as I have mentioned in the cases of business-owner employers. Some Filipinas help their employers with the maintenance of products in garment factories, others even work as assistants at Chinese medical clinics, and they still have to do ordinary housekeeping jobs before and after their work.

The other problem with regard to the type of work is that the jobs of baby-sitter and attendant to old people, for which demand is now on the increase, do not clearly fall into the category of domestic work. Since domestic work is not clearly defined in the Standard Employment Contract, tiring care-giving jobs, which otherwise would be costly, tend to be imposed upon foreign domestic helpers whose salary is fixed irrespective of the nature of their work. It is clear that many Filipina helpers working under these hard conditions with many duties feel that they are overworked. Cheung, who conducted research on the attitudes of Western and Chinese employers toward Filipina helpers, for example, reports that 35.5% of the Filipina respondents working for Chinese feel that they are treated like working machines and not as humans by their employers [*ibid.*: 19].

In my research, Chinese employers who treat Filipina helpers harshly emphasize that they do not believe in their helpers' ability to work, and are always trying to set them one task after another so they do not evade work. These employers treat their helpers in an oppressive way in accordance with their prejudices and biased image of Filipina helpers. And this is often countered by helpers with cold obedience on the surface, which results in a tense relationship with potential

hostility.

These hostile relationships, however, do not tend to last long. The employers who do not trust Filipina helpers' ability tend to change their helpers quickly, and their domestic helpers also sometimes refuse to renew their contracts even when their employers wish it. Filipinas who think themselves over-exploited by their Chinese employers might even sacrifice their benefits and resign before the usual term. Sometimes Filipinas can even place sanctions against employers whom they consider too harsh or exploitative. In one such case, a woman employer was not able to find a new domestic helper because of her bad reputation as a harsh employer among the Filipinas. This employer lived in a condominium for middle class families where most of the residents hire at least one Filipina helper. After her first domestic helper resigned, thinking that she was over-worked from taking care of the baby, her bad reputation quickly spread among the Filipinas in the condominium, who discouraged every candidate who appeared for an interview with the employer from signing a contract with her.¹³⁾ The Filipinas' well-developed communication network hindered an employer whom they regarded as their common enemy from hiring a new Filipina helper through direct negotiation. Generally, it is becoming more widely recognized that over-exploitative attitudes on the part of the employers do not bring much benefit in the long run. Chinese employers seeking relatively long-term relationships with their helpers are aware of the importance of mutual trust, and tend to seek symbiotic relationships with their Filipina helpers.

Contrary to the exploitative attitude of some Chinese employers, others are more conscious of the human rights of foreign domestic workers and try to treat their Filipina helpers as humanely as possible. Many of these employers are professionals and managerial class office workers with university education. Although Cheung concludes that Chinese employers are less conscious of the human rights of their domestic helpers than Western employers from the results of his research [*ibid.*], it appears from my research that many educated Chinese in the twenties and thirties are becoming more concerned with human rights.

Among these well-educated Chinese couples, it is common for both spouses to have a career ;

13) Earlier, I explained that Filipinas usually contract with their employers in advance of their entry into Hong Kong, and that this is a basic requirement for the domestic helper's visa. However, in reality, the actual number of Filipina migrants who are already in Hong Kong and personally seek employment seems to be increasing, for several reasons. One is probably that the flow of migrants is not controlled as originally intended by the law, and the number of Filipinas who remain and seek other employment in Hong Kong after the termination of their contracts is increasing. These undoubtedly include illegal over-stayers, but in most cases, I believe, they are former employees of upper-middle class Chinese who have immigrated to such destinations as Canada or Australia before the return of Hong Kong to China in 1997. (For details of the exodus of Hong Kong Chinese, see Skeldon [1994].) The other important reason is that more and more experienced migrants are trying to find better domestic work opportunities through direct, personal negotiations with prospective employers, in order to save expensive agency charges. Chinese employers are also willing to get their helpers through direct hire for the same reason, as I will explain in detail later. Thus, in order to increase their income, some Filipinas start to work for another employer as part-time helpers on their holidays or, sometimes, even during the absence of their original employers. Among those who seek either employers or helpers, the bulletin boards in supermarkets or convenience stores are commonly used for the communication and personal advertisements. The woman employer whom I have referred to here is one of those who tried to find a helper through personal negotiations.

and they are the ones who depend most on the labor of Filipina helpers as baby-sitters because of their continual need to reconcile their careers and child-rearing. In interviews, some of these employers even voiced somewhat guilty feelings about the practice of hiring foreign migrants as cheap labor, although they know that they have to depend on it in order to maintain their way of life. Partially to alleviate their guilty consciences, these employers try to treat their domestic helpers as much as possible as their equals according to their belief in human rights.

Besides their consciences, there is another reason for these employers to try to keep good relationships with their domestic helpers. It is common for those who have their helpers take care of their children to give top priority to their children's benefit in choosing their domestic helpers. To these employers, the helpers' quality as good baby-sitters matters most. Most of these employers reply that they do not wish to have a helper who cannot look after or get along with their children even if she is well qualified for other jobs, and, actually, some employers have either canceled or not renewed their contracts with their helpers for these reasons. On the other hand, many employers admit that they wish to continue to employ their helpers if their ability as baby-sitters is satisfactory, even when they are not necessarily so able in other jobs. In fact, some reply that they have renewed contracts with helpers because the helpers had been good to their children or their children had liked them very much, although they themselves did not highly evaluate the helpers' ability in housekeeping work. In this sense, the substitutability of foreign domestic helpers as cheap labor is somewhat reduced for these employers, and they tend to keep their relationships with specific domestic helpers once they find them trustworthy as care-takers of their children. At this point, it is in the employers' interest as well as the domestic helpers' to establish stable employment relationships for the purpose of sustaining their career and family life with the aid of domestic helpers to whom they can entrust the care of their children. To establish stable relationships, these employers try to develop mutual trust with their helpers by treating them well. Thus, there is a tendency for the employer-helper relationship to be adjusted to become more nearly equal and symbiotic.

Family Ideology and Employer-Domestic Helper Relationship

The way employers treat their helpers as their equals generally takes the form of treating them as a member of the family. This is because most Chinese employers, at least all of them I interviewed, invariably believe in family ideology as the basis of human equality. Hence, they also believe that they should extend and apply this equality principle to their treatment of domestic helpers if they wish to build stable, friendly relationships with them. Thus, for example, these employers generally prefer to eat the same menu together with their helpers at the same table, especially at dinner, rather than having their helpers serve while they eat. This is different in meaning from the similar practice among some Chinese merchants of having meals together with their employees for the simple purpose of saving time and trouble. These employers try to show that they do not intend to discriminate between helper and family but accept the helper as one of the family. Similarly, many of them always have their helpers join them for a casual dinner at a restaurant with their

extended families, and some invite their helpers to join their family for recreations such as picnics, or outings to the beach or the aquarium. Others celebrate their helpers' birthdays with a special dinner at a restaurant, as they do for their family members. Some even extend their friendship to their domestic helpers' families in the Philippines, and let their helpers go home with a message and gifts; others even start correspondence with their helpers' parents.

All of these forms of behavior by employers represent their intention as much as possible to realize equal relationships with their domestic helpers by accepting their helpers into their own family circles. Filipina helpers generally appreciate their employers' friendly, familial attitude, and are willing to continue working for their employers upon request. They also tend to be more content with their working conditions, even though the salary involved is the same as elsewhere, when they think their employers are good to them. In this sense, the relationship between the employer and the domestic helper seems to be made more relaxed and stable by the genial attitude of the employer. On the other hand, it also involves the difficulty that an equal relationship ultimately contradicts the basis of the employer-employee relationship as one between the supervisor and subordinate, which inevitably requires control and subordination for specific purposes. This is particularly so when the employer-employee relationship basically involves inequality in regard to legal rights, and is never an equal contract between the two parties on the same footing.

Contrary to their intentions, employers' efforts to bring their relationships with domestic helpers as close as possible to equal ones can disturb the stability of the primary framework of employment relations. One such extreme example which I came across in my research is a case of Chinese sisters who all had career jobs. They declared that they would treat their domestic helper as much as possible as their own sister and acted accordingly. They sympathized with their helper, who had had to give up her career as a nurse in the Philippines for a more profitable job as domestic helper in Hong Kong in order to support her family; and they were well aware that she was more than qualified for domestic work by her educational and occupational background. They respected her knowledge and experience as a nurse and let her take a lead in the health management of the family by following her instructions. She first appreciated her employers' treatment as "considerate," but gradually she became frustrated that she could only do the housekeeping jobs in the "family" and that she could never enjoy the same chance to follow a career as the rest of the "family" members in Hong Kong society. From her frustration, she began to complain and blame her employers about "unfair" treatment, charging that they would never treat her as their real sister despite their long relationship. After this trouble, the employers and the domestic helper could no longer maintain their relationship.

A gap between employer and helper over the definition and interpretation of their relationship can arise when the employer's attempt to realize an equal, friendly relationship with the domestic helper goes too far for the primary order of their employment relationship to be maintained. Employers need to keep basic control over their helpers no matter how genial their relationships become if they wish to maintain, and not to endanger, the primary framework of the employer-employee relationship.

If employers' treatment of helpers as family members can disturb the stability of their em-

ployment relationships, employers' attempt to establish stable, friendly relationships with their helpers by this means would seem to be counterproductive. Nevertheless, Chinese employers' general belief in the quasi-familial relationship as an equality model persists, which tends to put them in a dilemma between their beliefs and their need to control their helpers.

There seems to be a general pattern in the ways in which Chinese employers try to solve this dilemma: they do not give up the family ideology but rather try to find a way to reconcile it with the necessary control. When the equality rule involved in the family ideology is in conflict with the employer's authority over the employee, the need arises for some device for the employer to avoid this conflict and keep control over the helper. For this purpose, employers tend to apply the seniority principle in the family to their relationships with helpers, giving the junior roles to their helpers and taking the senior roles themselves. The role differentiation of employers from their helpers in their quasi-familial relationships appears in the ways that employers explain their relations with helpers: employers on good terms with their helpers often compare them to their juniors by referring to them as being "just like my real daughter" or "almost my younger sister." It is significant that employers explaining their good relationships with helpers always compare the helpers to juniors and never to seniors such as mothers or elder sisters. The seniority rule in the family allows employers indirect control over their helpers through the family norm by which the junior member is expected to respect and spontaneously defer to the senior. Thus, employers can exert their authority and power as employers without particularly applying direct control, by emphasizing the junior status of the helpers in the family.

The junior roles expected of domestic helpers coincide with their actually being younger than their employers in most cases. The majority of Filipina domestic helpers are in their twenties and early thirties, while their Chinese employers tend to be older, having accordingly higher income levels and occupational status, which enable them to employ domestic helpers. Even in those cases in which the helpers are older than their employers, it is interesting that the employers still try to sustain a quasi-familial relationship as the basis of control. Typically, the focus is shifted such that the significant family relationship is defined not by the helpers' age relative to their employers but by their senior status in relation to the employers' children. This kind of shift commonly arises when a young Chinese couple with a small child need a helper as a baby-sitter. In such cases, the significant family norm in the employers' discourse shifts from the obligations of the junior toward the senior member in the family to those of the senior toward the junior. The age difference between employer and helper is played down, and the fact that the helper is older than the employer's child is emphasized. Hence, the helper is supposed to play the role of a senior toward the child, such as "elder sister" or "aunt," and she has both to take good care of and set a good example to her junior.

In effect, employers try to keep control over their helpers by utilizing and manipulating family ideology in accordance with the situation, no matter whether helpers are younger or older than themselves. Most Chinese employers recognize the need to treat their helpers as one of their own family in order to make their relationships closer to those of equals, not only from the point of view of strategy for stable employment but also from that of morality for better relationships. On the other hand, differences in status and the existence of authority in the family are generally accepted

without argument and are not regarded as conflictive with the general equality rule in society. Therefore, there is room for employers to exercise indirect control over their helpers by manipulating the helpers' acceptance of hierarchy in the family. Employers try to reconcile their need for control over their helpers with the intention to make their relationships with helpers mutually beneficial by changing their control from a direct, formal type to an indirect, familialistic, and hence moralistic one.

Family Ideology, Patron-Clientship, and Chain Migration

In this way, as the familialistic ideology is applied to employer-helper relationships, they begin to acquire the tint of a patron-clientship. Partly, this is a natural consequence of the employers' moralistic control over their helpers based on family ideology, since it requires employers to become more concerned with their helpers' personal life as well as their job achievements. Because they exercise moralistic control, employers inevitably become more involved in their helpers' personal matters and sometimes take care of them in times of trouble. The patron-client relationship appears most clearly in the paternalistic measures employers sometimes take in dealing with their helpers' personal troubles. A typical example is the case of an employer who noticed her helper's trouble with debt, gave the helper an advance on her salary to repay the loan company and renewed her contract so that she could keep working in Hong Kong until she had repaid all her debt. This employer could have terminated the helper's contract on the grounds of incautious behavior, but instead decided to help her out of the trouble. According to the employer, she took this paternalistic measure because of the helper's contribution to her family and, especially, her devotion to her child, ever since she began working for her.

Paternalistic treatment of helpers by employers has a clear effect on their relationships : helpers come to owe their employers "utang na loob," internal debts [Hollnsteiner 1970] for personal favors beyond their general obligations as employees. This obliges helpers to be more loyal, for they do not have any resource other than loyalty with which they can reciprocate employers' favors. Thus, helpers become closely tied to employers even in their informal, personal relations to them by being involved in the reciprocity of favors and loyalty. This reciprocity, in effect, serves to sustain the employers' superior and helpers' subordinate positions and reinforce the employers' control over their helpers. As has been explicated in the exchange theory, the norm of reciprocity that demands equal exchange on the one hand only confirms and intensifies the already existing inequality in terms of resources and power between the two parties [Blau 1964 : 26, 28-29]; the positions of the employer as supervisor and the helper as subordinate are also fixed and stabilized in their unequal exchanges, where the helper can only offer her loyalty in return for the employer's paternalistic favors.

Not only does the patron-clientship reinforce the employer-helper relationship, it can also reproduce it by duplicating itself through personal introductions of helper candidates to prospective employers. A Chinese looking for a domestic helper and a Filipina seeking employment usually find each other through either a private agency or a mutual acquaintance. The personal introduction,

when it is possible, is usually preferred both by employers and helpers because both of them can save the placement fees and other expenses charged by an agency. The proportion of contract placements by these two means, according to the survey conducted by the Asian Migrant Workers Centre in 1989, is about 70% by private agencies and 30% by personal introductions, out of 1,720 cases [AMWC 1991: 28]. It is not certain whether this proportion has changed since then, although the total number of Filipina domestic helpers has almost doubled since 1990. However, it is reasonable to expect that placements by agencies are increasing, as the demand for helpers has skyrocketed and many more new migrants are being introduced to this job niche. On the other hand, personal introductions can also be expected to become more common as the number of long-term or repeated migrants to Hong Kong increases, for they are familiar with the employment systems and probably have more sources of information. In the case of personal introduction, mutual trust between the Chinese and Filipinos concerned is necessary since they have to vouch for the people whom they introduce to each other. An employer and helper who enjoy mutual trust in their stable patron-client relationship, therefore, tend to work as a nexus in a network of personal introductions of helper candidates to prospective employers. Several other employer-helper couples are often observed around such a core couple who have helped them find each other. These introduction networks spread randomly along the lines of kinship networks of both the employer and helper; thus, several employer-helper couples are often established among the kin of one employer-helper couple who have worked as go-betweens for the rest of them. The patron-clientship between the employer and helper thus serves as a migration chain which facilitates successive influxes of Filipina migrants and canalizes them into the occupational niche of domestic helpers in Hong Kong.

Effects on Ethnic Relations : A Comparison with Filipina Entertainers in Japan

If the Chinese employer-Filipina domestic helper relationship tends to develop into a patron-clientship which works as a migration chain for many other Filipina migrants, what are the effects of the patron-clientship on the ethnic relations between Chinese and Filipinos in Hong Kong, and how, conversely, do their ethnic relations affect the life of Filipina migrants in general?

As explained in the last chapter, the patron-clientship reinforces and even multiplies employer-domestic helper relations between Chinese and Filipinos through the personal, informal commitments implied in it. At the same time, these commitments also serve to restrain the development of other relationships by sustaining the existing ones of employer-helper between the two groups.

On the other hand, inter-ethnic contacts through one channel of formal relations sometimes develop other informal relationships and open up a new channel of contact between the two groups. Thus, even when there is a firm boundary which limits channels of inter-group contacts, there is still a chance for new relationships to branch off from existing ones through very limited contacts. The new relationships which develop from the old ones in this way can, in turn, affect the ethnic relations of the two groups and give them another aspect.

In the case of ethnic relations between Filipinos and Japanese in Japan, where the majority of

Filipinos are women migrants working as entertainers,¹⁴⁾ the only significant channel of inter-group contact is the relationships between Filipinas and Japanese men as entertainers and customers. As with the Filipina domestic helpers in Hong Kong, jobs as entertainers are almost the only occupational niche for Filipinos in Japan. There also seems to be a firm ethnic boundary between the Filipinos and Japanese. Interactions between the two groups are limited almost entirely to those between Filipina entertainers and their Japanese employers, co-workers, and customers in the work domain. The most significant relationships among these are those of entertainers and customers, in which informal, personal interactions between Filipinas and Japanese can be initiated. The personal interactions between the entertainer and customer often lead to friendship or sometimes even to marriage. In effect, the Filipina migration to Japan, begun in the early 1980s, has resulted in more than 20,000 marriages between Filipinas and Japanese,¹⁵⁾ and the arrival of more than 100,000 Filipina migrants.

In the Japanese case, personal, informal interactions between the Filipina entertainer and Japanese customer can yield another relationship such as friendship, which can completely change their formal relationship as entertainer and customer to one of wife and husband. In other words,

14) My discussion here on Filipino-Japanese ethnic relations is based on my observations during preliminary research in Japan in 1993 and 1994. The precise number of Filipina entertainers in Japan is not necessarily easy to grasp in statistics. In order to estimate their number, two sets of official statistics are available: one is the data based on alien registration, which is obligatory for all foreign residents who stay over 90 days in Japan; the other is the number of legal migrants based on the records of the Immigration Bureau. The problem with the former figure, in trying to get the actual number of Filipina entertainers, is that it does not reflect the number of short-term visitors, expected to leave within 90 days, most of who come as tourists, which actually includes a large number of illegal Filipina entertainers. And the latter should be considered as the total number of Filipinos who entered Japan within a given year rather than the actual Filipino population resident in Japan. For 1994, the former records the total number of registered Filipinos in Japan as 85,968, of which women constitute almost 87% (74,805) (*Zairyugaikokujin Tokei* (Foreign Residents Statistics) 1995, Japan Immigration Association); and the latter gives a figure of 126,739, of which women represent about 80% (101,709) (*Annual Report of Statistics on Legal Migrants* (ARSLM) 1995, Judicial System and Research Department). Therefore, the number of Filipinas who actually stayed in Japan in 1994 must fall somewhere between 74,805 and 101,709. The difficulty in discerning the exact number of entertainers among these women is that, firstly, there is no figure indicating the number of Filipino women by visa category in ARSLM and the only available figures are the numbers of Filipino nationals including both sexes by visa category; secondly, Filipinas working as entertainers are also included in categories other than the official category of "entertainer" in ARSLM. Thus, it is estimated that, aside from most of those who came with entertainers' visas (53,996, including both sexes), a considerable portion of the temporary visitors (32,105, including both sexes) and some of those who came under the category of spouse or child of Japanese national and permanent resident (26,664, including both sexes) constitute the population of entertainers in the year of 1994 (*ibid.*)

15) Due to the lack of the official records, exact data on the number of the marriages between Filipinas and Japanese men are available only from 1992. According to the limited data, however, marriages between Filipinas and Japanese men outnumber all the other international marriage patterns among the Japanese for the past three years, accounting for 5,771 marriages in 1992, 6,394 in 1993, and 5,999 in 1994 (*Vital Statistics* 1993, 1994, 1995, Ministry of Health and Welfare). For years earlier than 1992, we can only refer to the number of "certificates of legal capacity to marry" issued by the Japanese Embassy in Manila, which are pre-requisite for the issue of a marriage license for Japanese citizens marrying Filipino nationals in the Philippines. These data do not include marriages that took place in Japan, but they give some idea of the growing number of marriages.

the friendship that emerges from the relationship between entertainer and customer can serve to deny and change the very relationship from which it has branched off. Thus, through one open channel, there is a chance for a new dimension of relationships to develop between two ethnic groups separated by a firm boundary, which in effect multiplies the limited channels between the two groups.

In the Hong Kong case, on the contrary, the patron-clientship does not serve to yield other relationships. Although it develops from the formal relationship of employer and helper, it sustains the employer-helper relationship by overlapping it and hinders the emergence of other relationships. Thus, the chance for new channels to develop between Chinese and Filipinos is very limited, in spite of increasing interactions between the two groups through the existing channel of relations as employer and helper with the growing influx of Filipina migrants to Hong Kong. Hence, the ethnic boundary between Chinese and Filipinos, which keeps them apart by limiting the chance of inter-group contacts, persists despite the rapidly increasing interactions between the two ethnic groups.

The effects of such ethnic relations between the Chinese and Filipinos on the life of Filipina migrants are, therefore, considered to be as follows. In addition to the general difficulty for Filipinos to find other niches than in the occupational status of domestic helper, there is little chance for them to develop other relations with the host Chinese within their limited interaction channel even after they have stayed for some time in Hong Kong. Ways for them to change their status or achieve upward mobility are virtually closed, and Filipina migrants tend to be fixed in the same socioeconomic status of domestic helper no matter how long they have stayed in Hong Kong. In this way, the Filipina migration to Hong Kong tends to be kept in the stage of recurrent or circular migration and does not develop to that of immigration or settlement.

Issued Number of Certificates of Legal Capacity to Marry, by Year	
1986	654
1987	1,732
1988	3,569
1989	4,406
1990	4,180
1991	4,503

Source: The Japanese Embassy in the Philippines

As a result of the increasing number of international marriages, as of 1994, the number of Filipinos categorized as spouse or child of a Japanese national and permanent resident has grown to 36,653, which makes them the second biggest group next to the Brazilians (41%) in the same category, representing about 15% of all (*Zairyugaikokujin Tokei* (Foreign Residents Statistics) 1995, Japan Immigration Association). There are also many Filipinas who cannot be legally married to their Japanese partners because divorce is not legal in the Philippines, and thus the actual number of Filipina wives is higher than it appears in the statistics. On the process by which Filipino women and Japanese men come to get married, the report based on the true-life stories by Megumi Hisada provides a lively image of such couples, although her descriptions are somewhat affected by a journalistic bias [Hisada 1989].

Conclusion

From the foregoing discussions, it can be concluded that a relationship between a Filipina helper and Chinese employer tends to attain stability when it acquires a tint of quasi-familial relationship. It effectively relieves tensions inherent in the employment relationship by transforming the business-like atmosphere into a more genial one, but still enables employers to control helpers indirectly by manipulating seniority rules in the family ideology. It is considered by Chinese employers to be not only useful as a strategy for control but also essential in order to build a humane relationship with their helpers; for a family is believed to be a basic model for peace and human equality. The quasi-familial relationship is thus sustained by Chinese morality as well, and generally preferred by both employers and helpers.

An employer-helper relationship, by acquiring a quasi-familial atmosphere, leads to a patron-clientship in which both parties are united with each other by a personalized tie of obligations beyond that of a mere contract. It obliges employers to grant their helpers more favors than they should as employer, and helpers to reciprocate by showing more loyalty than they should as domestic helper. The patron-clientship does not drastically change an employer-helper relation based on contract, but reinforces it by adding personal dimensions to their commitment. It serves to sustain their contract by adding mutual trust to their relationship.

By achieving a stable relationship based on mutual trust, the patron-clientship tends to become a nexus in a network of personal introductions of helper candidates to prospective employers, and to facilitate the influx of Filipina migrants into Hong Kong society by channeling them into new job openings for domestic helpers. In other words, employer-helper relationships duplicate themselves easily by transforming into patron-clientships, which, in effect, induce chain migration of Filipinas domestic helpers to Hong Kong.

In this paper, I have tried to present one example of an emergent ethnic relationship directly caused by migration and its effect in turn on migration pattern, by reference to the relationship of one Southeast Asian group with another people in the contemporary context. Ethnic relations take various forms according to the equilibrium point they find between the two poles of conflict and symbiosis, and not only the form but also the process by which it develops varies from one case to another since each case has its own unique conditions and situation. These processes deserve more attention, for they provide vital clues to the understanding of different ethnic relations and migration patterns.

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