

WOMEN AND MEN MIGRANTS IN HONG KONG

SOCIAL CHANGE IN ASIA
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GENDER AND NATION

- Honor of nation (Indonesia or Philippines) is connected to morality of women
 - “Moral” women are in the home and protected from harm
 - Notice both Islam and Christianity agree on this point
 - The honor of the nation’s men is connected to their ability to protect “their” women
- Migrant women are critical income earners in both countries both for family and country
 - Governments are subject to criticism when “their” women are subject to violence and temptation
 - Normative gender roles define the moral grounds upon which women must fashion themselves as workers p57
 - Ideal worker are obedient, disciplined, and affordable, and their sexuality is ideally nonexistent
 - Government laws ostensibly protect the women, but often indenture them (deprive them of agency)

FOREIGN DOMESTIC WORKERS IN HONG KONG

- Majority from Indonesia and the Philippines (about 150,000 each)
 - Come on 2-year renewable “domestic worker” visas
 - Must live full-time with their employer, and do household work
 - No limitation on hours—childcare, eldercare, cooking, cleaning

AGENCIES

- Indonesian and Filipino workers are required to use an employment agency
 - HK\$3000 (US\$ 390) per month to agency for 7 months (usually taken as loan)
 - If fired before seven months accumulates debt and must acquire another 7 months of debt
 - Some agencies charge extra fees
- In some cases women get caught in a debt trap and become like “bonded labor” (debt peonage)
 - Because of debts women are sometimes motivated to remain in violent households

TWO WEEK RULE

- Since 1987 worker must leave Hong Kong within two weeks of the termination of her contract (unless she finds another employer)
 - This is true even if she has remaining time on her visa
 - If her employer has not fully paid her it is difficult for her to sue for back pay (since she has to leave and is not allowed to work even if she stays)

LIVING IN

- Workers are bound to one household and must live in
 - Mostly in relatively small apartments with only one day off
 - Paid below the minimum wage for Hong Kong workers
- Living “out” (even with employer’s permission) is not allowed and will lead to deportation
- Locals tend to think FDW’s should “know their place” and be quiet and obedient

OVERSTAYERS

- Ara—when her contract ended, she could double her salary by overstaying and working in a restaurant
 - She could share rooms in a boarding house but got pregnant with a date rape drug (she thinks)
 - She blames the 2 week rule and agency fees for her plight

DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

- Need for domestic workers appeared in Hong Kong in the 1970s
 - Hong Kong women were beginning to work outside the home
 - Extended family members able to take over domestic chores became less common
- Initially Filipinas were by far the most popular
 - Were considered desirable for their ability to speak English and teach it to the children
 - By the late 1990s Filipino activism had reduced abuses of Filipinas, and Filipinas were older and educated
 - Professional and managerial classes tend to hire Filipinas
- Indonesian women began migration as a result of the 1998 financial crisis and the fall of the Suharto
 - Many were trained in Cantonese before working, and so preferred
 - Younger and less educated than Filipinas, they “knew their place” and were hired by less elite families

COMPARATIVE MIGRATION

	Philippines	Hong Kong	PRC	South Korea	Japan
• 1980	low growth →	migrants	city	migrants	migrants
• 1990	low growth →	migrants	NE →	migrants	migrants
• 2000	Indonesia →	migrants		migrants	migrants
• 2010	Indonesia →	migrants	←	migrants	→ ← migrants

RELIGION

- Filipinas
 - 80% Catholic, 10% Protestant, 5% Muslim
- Indonesians
 - 85% Muslim, 8% Christian, 2% Hindu
- Conversions usually related to religion of boyfriend/husband
 - Christian→Muslim
 - Muslim→Christian

FILIPINO RELIGION

- Constable's picture is similar to that of Faier
- Man is the “pillar of the home” and woman is the “light of the home”
 - Men who migrate are playing their proper role
 - Women who migrate are outside their proper place, and children may not receive their mother's care
- Filipinos worry that female migration “undermines the social fabric of the country”
 - Women outside of their proper place, children not raised by mother
 - People worry about migrants' sexual morality
 - But women become more independent and self-confident, too
- Divorce is not possible, but separation and new partnerships happen (but remarriage is not recognized and new children are considered “illegitimate” by the Philippine state)

INDONESIAN RELIGION

- Women expected to marry and be obedient wives and mothers raising children
 - Women under father's control until marriage, and husband's control afterwards
 - Women need father or husband's permission to work abroad, and cannot do so if they have a children over 1 year
 - Divorce is possible but stigmatized—"failed wife", "possible home wrecker" (same for single mothers)
- Most Indonesian women have arranged marriage
- Among Muslims a *nikah* blessing permits an informal union (it is *hallal*, permitted)

MALE CONTINUUM OF PRECARITY

- Permanent residents—mostly Chinese
 - Can reside, work, children automatic permanent residence, can sponsor foreign spouse as dependent
- Legally admitted skilled workers or dependents who do not yet have permanent residence
- Contract workers with temporary entry permits
 - Children might get permanent residence under certain circumstances but not the parent
- Visitors with no legal right to work (such as tourists and students)
- Those with “immigrant papers”—asylum seekers, torture claimants, and recognized refugees
 - May not work and will not be resettled in Hong Kong
- Overstayers—usually enter Hong Kong legally but then overstay their visa

ETHNIC DIVERSITY OF FATHERS

- Traders who come to Hong Kong frequently on short-term visas
 - Many from Africa, some American or European
- Owners or managers of small businesses
 - Mostly Chinese, but also South Asian permanent residents
 - Some had wives in their home country (including Chinese mainland) but kept Hong Kong girlfriends
- Temporary workers
 - Mostly South Asians who overstayed their visas (shop clerks, waiters, dishwashers)
 - Some work for South Asian permanent residents

SOUTH ASIANS IN HONG KONG

- Originally arrived in Hong Kong to serve in British colonial police force
 - Before India become independent Sindhis and Punjabis (today's Pakistan) were predominant
 - After Indian independence in 1949 the British favored Nepali Gurkhas
- During British colonial times (1841-1997) South Asians continued to come to Hong Kong
 - Security guards,, construction, and other wage work
 - Today Hong Kong's South Asian community also includes long-established traders, successful international businessmen, philanthropists as well as poor manual laborers and asylum seekers
- Today's South Asian Community in Hong Kong includes far more men (85%) than women
 - Many have wives and families in the country of origin, and some have families in Hong Kong as well

SOUTH ASIAN MEN WITH FDW GIRLFRIENDS

- Both groups "functionally single" since neither can bring spouses with them even if they have them
- Both predominantly of single sex so compatriots of the opposite sex are hard to find
- Both are at the bottom of the Hong Kong social hierarchy, so local women or men are seldom interested in them
- Most South Asian men in Hong Kong are Pakistani and Muslim, and as a group have low levels of education (though there are also highly educated ones)
 - Filipinas speak English (so good for communication), but they tend to be Christian and to be better educated than the Pakistanis, and unless they convert to Islam they tend to have rocky relations with Pakistanis
 - In recent years Indonesian women who are Muslim are seen as better matches for Pakistanis

GURKHAS (ETHNIC NEPALI SOLDIERS)

- Recruited into the British army in Hong Kong after 1949
 - Children of Gurkha soldiers born in Hong Kong were given the right of residency by the British (most took it up in the 1990s)
 - Religion Hindu or Buddhist
 - After reversion to China in 1997 Gurkhas were allowed to stay, and can sponsor dependants
 - Usually children were sent home to be raised in Nepal by their mothers, and returned to Hong Kong as young men
 - The disadvantage of this is that they lack literacy in Cantonese and are not well-educated in Nepali either
 - Thus, while they often have rights of residency, they sometimes are caught “in cultural limbo” and become delinquent (drugs, drinking)

AFRICAN MEN

- Traders from Sub-Saharan Africa have proliferated in South China in recent years
- In the early 2000s African asylum seekers also appeared in Hong Kong
- Most (but not all) of these are men, and many are of middle-class background (and thus could afford the airfare to Hong Kong)
- Africans experience discrimination by the Hong Kong Chinese, and appreciate that the FDWs are kinder to them
 - Can be Muslim, Catholic, or Protestant and attend mosques or churches where they can mingle with other worshipers
 - Asylum seekers are prohibited from working, so they are dependent on others
 - Even if they are granted asylum they will not be resettled in Hong Kong, but elsewhere

CHINESE AND OTHER MEN

- Chinese men who marry FDWs can sponsor them for residence in Hong Kong
 - Some of Constable's informants achieved this
 - Many of these relationships were extramarital, employer/employee, etc.
- Southeast Asian Men
 - Most of these relationships were marital relations with a person of the same nationality whom they married before coming to Hong Kong
- Other Men from Europe or America
 - Temporary visitors (business or tourism) with temporary affairs and no responsibility for children
 - A few affluent permanent residents with already-grown families married women twenty or more years younger than they and lived in affluent parts of town

MEN'S VIEWS OF WOMEN

- Asylum seeker's "pragmatic" views of women
 - For example, they might abandon a woman they really like to marry a Chinese to gain permanent residency
- Men's appreciation for FDWs
 - "They like us better than the Chinese" or "they are much nicer than Chinese women"
 - Filipinas are well educated and confident, but "bossier than Indonesians" while Indonesians are less education but "have curiosity" are naïve but kind
 - Chinese women "expect you to do everything for them"
 - Muslim men tend to be critical of Southeast Asian women who do not fully cover themselves
 - Many men distinguish between love and sex, and claim women do not
 - Some men claim FDW women are aggressive seekers of male companionship
 - Myths of those who have sex every two hours on Sunday (both male and female)—Constable doesn't discount