

原著論文

第二の母は外国人労働者：シンガポールにおけるフィリピン人 ドメスティック・ワーカーの軽視される経験的知見

金 滋英*

Second Mother, Not Even a Second-Class Citizen: The Overlooked Intellectual Asset of Filipino Domestic Workers in Singapore

Ja Yung Kim*

要 旨

本論は、外国人ドメスティック・ワーカーが職業上得ることができる見識が豊かで意義深いものであるにもかかわらず、受け入れ国や就労先の家庭で有効に活用されていない実態に注目した。彼女らの経験的知見に価値を見出さない社会の背景として1) 安価な外国人労働者を必要とする経済、2) 外国人労働者を臨時的労働力としてのみ扱い定住させない政策、また3) 就労先の家庭で外国人ドメスティック・ワーカーがより子供との関係に近いことに対する雇用主の親としての心理、などに注目し、それらの事項が「外国人ドメスティック・ワーカーは知的に劣っている」という偏見を土台にして成り立っている側面を文献調査、及びシンガポールでのフィリピン人ドメスティック・ワーカーへのインタビューをもとに考察した。外国人ドメスティック・ワーカーの仕事は住み込みで家事や子供や老人の世話をするため、特に子供とは深い人間関係を築き、親よりも子供の様子を把握できているケースが多い。また、出身国や仕事で滞在した国々での多様な家庭や人々の観察は、家庭内でのみ人々が見せる言動を含み、研究者たちには集められない貴重なデータである。そのような知見は、子供の心身の健康、また家族のあり方の改善など、シンガポールが抱える社会問題を考える上で有用であることを指摘した。

キーワード：外国人ドメスティック・ワーカー、出稼ぎ、経験的知見、シンガポール、フィリピン

Abstract

This article examines the complex status of foreign domestic workers to understand why their empirical knowledge on education and family culture are not utilized at all in the host societies with the focus on Filipino workers in Singapore. Many foreign domestic workers gain information and ideas through their work experiences at households with different cultural background; besides, they usually spend a longer amount of time with the children than the parents. Their observations are in-depth and done at private homes, which academics cannot access through their regular data collection methods, therefore wider society would benefit from the domestic workers' intellectual assets, especially in the education domain. However, the condescending gaze toward foreign domestic workers has been present in society; such prejudice is intertwined with the employers' emotions, and working conditions of the domestic workers. Employers are reluctant to ask their domestic workers for their opinions on their children's well-being for the fear of unsettling their roles as parents, and also to maintain the hierarchical

* 名桜大学環太平洋地域文化研究所共同研究員 〒905-8585 沖縄県名護市字為又1220-1 Institute for Pacific Rim Studies, Meio University, 1220-1 Bimata, Nago-city, Okinawa, Japan

relationship. The Singaporean economy aims to treat the foreign domestic workers as unskilled transient workers for several reasons, and appreciating their knowledge would contradict their work conditions.

Keywords: foreign domestic worker, transient, intellectual asset, Singapore, Filipino

Introduction

Domestic work is essential in every household. Major domestic work tasks include cooking, cleaning, laundry, grocery shopping, gardening, childcare, and elderly care. One can employ professionals to do the work if he/she can afford to pay for the service. There is an increasing demand for domestic workers in the Middle East, Europe and the newly industrialized countries in Asia. Domestic workers come from countries where economic standards are lower (ILO 2019). This is because those foreign domestic workers would agree to work for a relatively low wage, as long as it is enough to support their families back home; the affordable wage enables more people to hire domestic workers. In many host countries, foreign domestic workers stay with temporary status and are not expected to settle down as members of society.

Foreign domestic workers' (FDWs) working conditions are often described as exploitative (TWC2 2006) due to several unique characteristics of live-in domestic work: 1) The workplace is private and hidden from the public eye; 2) The employer's superiority complex creates a dominant relationship between a domestic worker and her employer (Tappert and Dobner 2013); 3) FDWs owe agent fees to sending agents when they start working in Singapore, and they try to stay on the job even in the case of maltreatment by their employers to avoid paying additional transfer fees to the agents (TWC2 2006); 4) FDWs' working conditions are not regulated under national legislation in 99% of the Asia and Pacific nations (ILO 2013).

In addition to FDWs' status, studies have also focused on the children being looked after by FDWs hired by their family. Those studies examined the influences of FDWs on their employers' children in two areas: the children's academic achievement and their behavior. Studies show that Filipino FDWs positively influence the children they take care of in

their academic progress in English-related subjects. Many Singaporean employers prefer FDWs from the Philippines for their English knowledge even though Filipino FDWs' minimum wage is the highest of all FDWs. Having English as a mutual language is advantageous for good communication between the worker and the employer and the English language development of the children in the household (Dulay et al., 2017).

However, studies on behavior and social skills of the children with maids showed a negative impact on the children: 1) Children rely on the maid to do all the chores, and they lack the necessary skills to look after themselves (Yeoh et al. 1999, Bradley 2010); 2) Children are spoon-fed by their maids and often lack self-control since their parents often prohibit maids from disciplining them (Yeoh et al. 1999).

Apart from the children's academic development, new questions have arisen regarding the families with maids: How is the parent-child relationship affected? Al-Matary and Ali (2013) studied the influence of having a maid's help in childcare on mother-child attachment in Malaysia. The study was based on a questionnaire survey. It concluded that maids' presence might negatively impact the psychosocial development of children in the household. The study mentioned that 24.2% of the participants expressed discomfort in answering whether their bonding with the children is diminished because they have maids. Furthermore, the study showed that those who felt uncomfortable answering the question actually think that the relationships with their children are less intimate. Perhaps, such "discomfort" needs to be studied further. Such is the dilemma faced by parents; while they are aware of the importance of spending time with their children, to earn enough to maintain a "normal" lifestyle in the competitive society, they must sacrifice their time with their families.

Another discomfort-related topic, mentioned chiefly in non-academic media, is the children's

emotional attachment to their maids. For instance, in an article titled “4 Common Domestic Helper Problems and How to Overcome Them”, written by an FDW agency, the authors identify the child being too attached to the domestic helper as one of significant problems.¹ Stories of children developing emotional bonds with their maids, sometimes stronger than the bonds they have with their parents, are well-known. Also, in the interviews for this study, one FDW shared a story in which her employer asked her how she can be closer to her child as a mother after the child accused his mother of never being there for him. The child had told his mother that the maid cares for him more than the mother does.

This study aims to shed light on negative outcomes in households with FDWs, which inevitably affect the well-being of current and future generations of the host nation. This study also concurs with ILO’s Recommendations (ILO 2019) to promote inclusion, social interaction and community engagement. Notably, this study supports Recommendation 1.2: “Design, support and deliver policies that facilitate platforms and community events where migrant workers and the public can meaningfully interact and demonstrate the positive impact of migrant workers on societies and economies.” (ILO 2019 p.XVI) The economic impact on host nations of keeping FDWs in temporary positions has been studied by Ghosh and Lien (2002). They argue that importing low-wage FDWs as a transient workforce would eventually result in a lower saving rate and negative economic growth of the host nations. The study also argues that cheap maid service would result in less time being spent with children and higher demand for children. It suggested that home education is not market-replaceable and only parents can provide it. Ghosh and Lien’s perspective shows that short-term economic gain could lead to economic loss and low quality of life for children.

This study is in line with the perspectives mentioned above that question the host nation’s benefit in keeping the FDWs in transient status, especially in children’s mental well-being and, consequently, in human resource development.

Furthermore, it is based on interviews with FDWs in Singapore conducted in 2018, which showed that FDWs had rich and in-depth observations of Singaporean family cultures. Moreover, in many households, FDWs spend a longer amount of time with the children than their parents, and it seems reasonable to value FDWs’ opinions in the home education field. However, regardless of its value, FDWs’ knowledge acquired through their work has yet to find an avenue to be heard and used. One interviewee told the author that she would always smile when she speaks to her employer and would not say too much of her opinion because FDWs are not expected to speak up. Employers and society may prefer not to see FDWs as equally intelligent. By categorizing FDWs as less-qualified workers, employers can be free from the guilt of hiring their maids with far below average conditions. Needless to say, because of the gap between the employers’ wage and the FDWs’ wage, employers can hire FDWs; and FDWs’ status remain transient because the salary is high enough to feed their families back home but not in the host countries.

This study contends that by treating FDWs only as temporal visitors or lower-class workers, the host society is missing the opportunity to utilize their intellectual asset. In addition, such FDW’s transient status is maintained by employers’ and the host nations’ desire and convenience. (1) I describe FDWs’ working conditions and provide background of the host countries; (2) I provide insight into the psychology of female employers; and (3) I posit that the employers’ self-perceived superiority is the main obstacle to prevent FDWs’ observation and knowledge from being heard and utilized in the society.

Among several nationalities, this study focuses on Filipino FDWs in Singapore. More than half of FDWs in Singapore are females from the Philippines, while the rest are from other Asian countries such as Indonesia, Burma, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. Many Singaporean employers prefer Filipino FDWs for their English proficiency (Huang and Yeoh 1998). In 2011, there were 206,300 FDWs in Singapore, and the number steadily grew to 255,800 by 2019.² The total

¹ Helperchoice Blog article in 2020 (<https://blog.helperchoice.com/?s=4+common+domestic>). (Retrieved on September 26, 2021)

² The data is from R. Hirschmann (2021) <https://www.statista.com/statistics/953137/singapore-foreign-domestic-workers-employed/>

number of domestic workers is 17% of Singapore's total workforce; in Singapore today, one in every five households hires an FDW (Tayah 2016), the highest rate in the neighboring Southeast Asia region. Based on the preliminary interviews with six Filipino migrant domestic workers working in Singapore, the analysis is rooted in insights from literary works, website articles, and movies. Lastly, regarding the terms in this paper, "domestic worker" and "maid" are used interchangeably.

The context of FDWs in Singapore

Nature of FDW

The 2011 International Labor Conference (No. 189) defined domestic work as follows: a) the term "domestic work" means work performed in or for a household or households; b) the term "domestic worker" means any person engaged in domestic work within an employment relationship; c) a person who performs domestic work only occasionally or sporadically and not on an occupational basis is not a domestic worker (ILO 2013, p.8). Domestic workers consist of maids, cooks, butlers, gardeners, chauffeurs, caretakers, babysitters, and so forth. Among them, indoor tasks are often regarded as the female's responsibility in many societies. Modern live-in FDWs in Singapore are all female. Female employers may prefer a female live-in domestic worker over a physically strong male, as they may consider females less threatening, considering the close physical contacts that the domestic worker and the family inevitably have in their urban households with small spaces. For instance, many Singaporean employers even make their maids sleep with their children in the same room. Hence, females are preferred as maids by most Singaporean employers.

The most salient characteristic of domestic workers in a modern social context is their low status; domestic workers are often regarded as low-skilled and paid a low wage. However, domestic workers have not always been so devalued. For instance, in British-occupied Singapore, Chinese female amahs were paid as much as English-speaking clerks and were in high demand for their

professional skills (Dodgson and Auyong 2016). The current low wage for FDWs is sustained only by the economic gaps between sending and receiving nations (Parreñas 2001). Though domestic work opportunities abroad are seen as great solutions for families of economically struggling countries, the reality of the work is problematic in many aspects.

Domestic workers are often marketed as a commodity, and there is an analogy between them and slaves. For instance, a maid agency advertised their hireable domestic workers using phrases such as "budget maid" and "special discount"³ as if FDWs were merchandise. This discriminatory social status leads many FDWs to suffer from low self-esteem (Ueno 2010). Many studies showed that FDWs face various difficulties; their work conditions and social status in their host countries are stigmatized (Parreñas 2001, Ueno 2010, Bolante 2018). For many FDWs, the reality of the work is in stark contrast with their initial aspiration of economic and social mobility (Huan and Yeoh 2007).

The FDWs' devalued status in Singapore is almost a social norm, facilitating the control of FDWs. Patterson (1982) argued that masters of slaves could maintain their authority over them when slaves do not have social existence outside of their masters. Although FDWs are not slaves, Patterson's explanation may be applied to the Singaporean context. Their marginalization in society forces FDWs to live within their employers' domains. In addition, the marginalized status justifies employers to treat their maids in degraded manners. Another justification for the maltreatment of maids is racial and cultural differences. Cheng (2006) found that some Taiwanese employers prefer to hire maids with different racial, physical appearances to use that difference to justify household hierarchies or maximize labor control. There are occasional incidents of maid abuse by employers, and they occur in the privacy of the home based on the inequality of status and ethnicity (Huan and Yeoh 2007).

Although working as an FDW entails multiple difficulties, as discussed above, it is also important to note that not all FDWs go through such stigmatization. The labor migration process

³ <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2014/06/27/buy-a-discount...ar3nakngbkd35uaorj2ze-xwxmegu5sdaavz0myggvr-vf0d-by-khikdg> (Retrieved on October 1, 2020)

empowers them and allows them to send remittances to their families in developing countries, which would be impossible if they worked in their countries of origin (Cheng 2006).

FDWs continue to support their families back home. Many studies discuss their transnational parenting and their role as a wife. Since only females are in demand, domestic work abroad is an opportunity for females in many developing countries; many Filipino women seek employment abroad as domestic workers due to poverty and lack of employment in the Philippines (Bolante 2018). Such increase in work opportunity abroad is changing the traditional ideas on gender roles in sending communities (Hapke and Ayyankeril 2018). While males in households have been the primary breadwinners in conventional families, female FDWs are now taking over the roles of males and supporting their families back home. Furthermore, FDWs' migration pattern changed the traditional migration pattern for females as "trailing spouses" of their husbands who decide to migrate (Yeoh et al. 1999, p.115). Though taking an FDW job may reverse the traditional gender role, the work opportunity should not be regarded simply as women's empowerment; working as a maid declines their occupational and social status drastically (Parranas 2001).

Regarding parenting, studies show that FDWs' role as mothers who care for their children back home continues despite the distance (Parreñas 2001, De Guzman 2014). Hence, many FDW mothers suffer the emotional insecurity of being geographically distant from their families (Baldassar et al. 2014, De Guzman 2014); they suffer especially from the stress of not fulfilling the traditional mother's role (Parreñas 2001). Some even argue that female FDWs divert their motherly care toward their employers' children since they can only love their own children remotely (Lan 2003, Parreñas 2003, De Guzman 2014). Although FDW mothers cannot physically be there

for their children back home, their remittances support their children's stable academic development. As such, data shows that FDWs' teen children earn better grades than their peers from non-FDW households (IOM 2009).

In Singapore today, the condition of FDWs is considered a norm, nothing is hidden, but society seems to accept and prefer the way it is. This study questions this situation and regards FDWs' current devalued status as inappropriate. As Patterson (1982) argued, their low social status is advantageous for employers to control the workers. This study focuses on how FDWs' marginalized status prevents their opinions from being heard in society.

Behind "the Success"

Apart from the domestic labor itself, Filipino FDWs' knowledge and ideas acquired through their work in modern cities are valuable for Singaporean society. To better understand the importance of FDWs' intellectual asset, this section will look into some of the social issues in Singapore. Singapore boasts a booming economy and the ninth highest per-capita GDP globally in 2019.⁴ The economic growth was so fast that the Singaporean people witnessed the nation's drastic change in one generation. Based on such an energetic and positive nation-building experience of recent years, there is a strong narrative of ideal lifestyle in Singapore which prioritizes economic success (Ho 2005). This prevailing narrative focuses on economic progress; aiming to fulfil the "successful Singaporean" narrative, people are pressured to work and study hard. The average workload for Singaporean workers was about 45 hours per week,⁵ and Singapore became the second hardest-working city in the world in 2019 (Lay 2019). Despite the hard work, the poverty rate in Singapore is on the rise,⁶ and its wealth inequality is becoming a severe social problem. Another important aspect of Singapore is that society emphasizes educational achievement, and its competitive education system

⁴ The data is from: <https://knoema.com/sijweyg/world-gdp-per-capita-ranking-2019-data-and-charts> (Retrieved on September 20, 2020).

⁵ The data is from: <https://stats.mom.gov.sg/Pages/Hours-Worked-Summary-Table%20backup.aspx> (Retrieved on September 25, 2021)

⁶ From the article "Poverty in Singapore: a New National Priority": <https://borgenproject.org/poverty-in-singapore/> (Retrieved on November 25, 2020)

is harming the mental health of many students (Poh 2018). However, FDWs' observations of children at home are hardly taken into consideration in policymaking.

Drawing on Giddens' structuration theory (1984), the characteristics of Singaporean society are not only encouraged by the government but also supported and reinforced by the residents' daily actions. Even when the system is causing social problems, those who are successful in living the ideal Singaporean narrative may not question the narrative of "success". On the other hand, those who cannot keep up with the competitive narrative will be marginalized; while experiencing and embodying the complication of the society, their voice will not be easily heard since they are, to a certain extent, devalued members of society. The situation is a vicious cycle in two aspects: 1) undereducated people are less likely to succeed financially and cannot afford education for their offspring; and 2) it is hard to improve or correct a system when its faults are felt only by the ones who are devalued in the system and society will not value their say. Among the marginalized are the FDWs, and in the glorified narrative of global cities, their stories are hidden (Lausch 2015). This paper aims to examine the dynamics within households that maintain FDWs' marginalized position in Singaporean society.

FDWs Allow Singaporean Mothers to Work

The high demand for FDWs manifests an aspect of family culture behind the ideal Singapore narrative. Parents must work such long hours that they do not have enough time to look after their children and tend to other domestic responsibilities. Since affordable domestic workers are there, people can continue working regardless of their domestic needs; without FDWs, many would not work full-time when they have small children or elderly relatives at home. Government economic policy requires local females to enter the labor force without hindrance from marriage, pregnancy or child-rearing

(Yeoh 1999, p. 117). To enable women to continue working, the government legalized affordable FDWs for Singaporean households. Having a maid for a family is becoming a standard arrangement in modern Singaporean households and is no longer considered a luxury.⁷

It is important to note here that FDWs become affordable for most Singaporeans only when there is enough difference in average wage of Singapore and the FDWs' home countries. Furthermore, the FDWs' wage must be kept lower than that of average Singaporean workers. The nature of the labor possibly justifies the low wage; tasks such as cleaning, cooking, or looking after children are often considered unskilled work. Above all, FDWs agree to work at this low wage.

Though the cost is low, employers need a certain level of disposable income to hire a maid. The Singaporean government has no intention to make FDWs affordable for all households. The government wants only skilled Singaporean females to remain in the workforce and unskilled Singaporean females to stay at home to do domestic work themselves.⁸ Therefore, the cost of hiring FDWs, including the government tax, is only affordable for skilled workers.

Such policies prioritize economic growth and international competitiveness over social equality within Singapore. If only skilled female workers could hire FDWs to help them with the domestic work, females who are yet unskilled at the time of pregnancy or marriage are disadvantaged in this aspect; the gap between skilled and unskilled Singaporean females is furthered widened by one's (in)ability to hire an FDW. In other words, many Singaporean females can put their time and energy into their career because they do fewer household chores. Thus, economic growth is prioritized at the government and individual levels.

Structurally Marginalized FDWs

FDWs in Singapore have been kept in a

⁷ According to the article "Maids in Singaporean Households No Longer a Luxury; Dependence on FDWs Projected to Rise" (2019): <https://theindependent.sg/maids-in-singaporean-households-no-longer-a-luxury-dependence-on-fdws-projected-to-rise/> (Retrieved on September 20, 2021)

⁸ Labour Minister Lee Boon Yang said "What we most avoid is to bring in large numbers of unskilled domestic servants so as to release equally unskilled Singapore women into the workforce." (*Strait Times*, March 11, 1992)

vulnerable position legally and, consequently, mentally. Firstly, they must pay expensive fees to their employment agencies worth a month to twelve months' wage (TWC2 2006). If a maid wishes to change her workplace, her employment agency will charge her additional fees, which discourages maids from complaining about their employers (Dodgson and Auyong 2016). Secondly, the legal environment around FDWs is not sufficient to support their employment. Though the Singaporean government enacted some regulations to protect FDWs after a series of major maid-abuse incidents in the 1990s (Dodgson and Auyong 2016), the regulations were not enough to eliminate abuse of maids in Singaporean society. For instance, in 2006, the government published a template for maid contracts which included items such as three "adequate" meals per day, or "recommends, but does not require" at least eight hours of continuous rest (Dodgson and Auyong 2016, p. 6). Such insufficient legal protection in Singapore has led to exploitation by employers.

As mentioned above, the FDWs' economic and legal conditions have led to the public view of FDWs as a sub-class of workers, separate from regular employees in other industries. It is a common perception among most of the employers of FDWs that maids are slaves rather than employees.⁹ A survey conducted in 2015 shows that 67% of employers did not allow their FDWs to keep their passports. Over 70% of FDWs experienced a restriction in both communication and movement by their employers (Wessels 2015). Due to the invisibility of live-in maids, these violations of regulations by employers are often tricky to recognize (Huan 2007, Dodgson and Auyong 2016). After examining the reality of FDWs' lives in Singapore, one may find some commonalities with the condition of slavery.

The government is reluctant to enact legislation to address concerns regarding FDWs since they are invited into Singapore only to facilitate economic growth in the country (Dodgson and Auyong 2016). The official stance toward FDWs is that they should stay in Singapore as a transient workforce (Yeoh et al. 1999). The government is hesitant to include them in Singaporean society. The following section

discusses what society loses by keeping FDWs in a stigmatized status.

FDWs' Intellectual Assets

Domestic workers acquire knowledge, most of it unconventional, through their work. Their knowledge is rarely utilized by the general public or in academics due to FDWs' stigmatized social status (Yelland et al. 2013). However, this study aims to suggest several areas that the host society could benefit from. (1) Cultural knowledge: FDWs compare cultures that they have experienced through domestic work. In the interview for this study, participants talked about different family cultures in Singapore, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia and Hong Kong. Those findings are based on participant observation and included family, gender, religion, money and food. Their observations are significant since the viewpoint is from their low social status, which allowed them to observe people's emotions and behaviors, usually hidden in the public domain. (2) Children's development: in many Singaporean households, children spend more time with their maids, and many feel emotionally closer to the maids than to their parents. FDWs are also able to observe family relationships and often have suggestions for improvements. (3) Global social structure: FDWs analyze the global economy and international relations through their existence. In the movie *Ilo Ilo* (2013), which we will cover later, the maid was criticized by the employer's child for leaving her child behind in the Philippines to work in Singapore; the maid questions back to him as "Then why did your mother get a stranger to look after her son?". The question describes the structure of the modern world, which prioritizes monetary gain and sacrifices ethics and happiness, a world to which both Singapore and the Philippines belong.

The intellectual assets of FDWs have been disregarded in Singapore due to their low social status. As discussed in earlier sections, Singaporean society desires to keep FDWs marginalized. The following sections will shift the focus to the domestic domain and discuss those elements which demand FDWs' continued marginalization.

⁹ <https://www.marketing-interactive.com/street-talk-mothers-speak-oms-provocative-mums-maids-spot> (Retrieved on September 27, 2020)

Domestic Dynamics

Maternalistic Relationship

The following sections investigate the situation and psychological dynamics in households with FDWs, particularly the asymmetrical power relations between female employers and domestic workers, to find the elements which contribute to maintaining FDWs' transient status. Many studies depicted a system of power relations between the female employer and her maid, in which the female employer holds power over her maid (Arnado 2003, Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007). However, this maternalistic relationship is not simply sustained by one-way authority from the employers; domestic workers also seek maternal protection from their employers out of feelings of isolation. Arnado (2003) documented this maternalistic relationship as a product of both structure and agency, which enables systematic exploitation maintained by actions of both the employers and their maids. In other words, some FDWs start to play their role in the narrative created for employers' convenience; the maternalistic relationship is convenient for the employers to make their maids work beyond their typical job descriptions.

It is essential to mention here that some employers are aware of the problematic power relations in their household, and they aim to establish a professional relationship with their maids (Cheng 2006). However, under the current work conditions with low wages and long work hours, it may be challenging to create a neutral relationship. To add, such effort is not significant enough to influence the general dynamics of the relationship between maids and employers.

My Happiness on Your Sacrifice

As discussed earlier, the principal purpose of hiring FDWs for many employers is to work outside instead of doing unpaid domestic chores. It is mothers more than fathers who gain more freedom by hiring FDWs since domestic work is generally regarded as women's work; it is freedom

from motherhood's responsibilities, which usually restrict career advancement. With the help of FDWs, Singaporean mothers can work overtime or even take overseas business assignments.

Similarly, many FDWs have children, and they are able to work abroad because they have someone to look after their children back home. The reality of a Filipino mother looking after a Singaporean baby while her baby is left behind in the Philippines can be explained from the financial perspective; she earns more in Singapore than in the Philippines. However, there is a significant difference between Singaporean employer mothers and Filipino FDW mothers. Singaporean mothers can see their children after work every day, but Filipino mothers cannot see their children for a long time, many times for more than a year. Most employers choose to forget that the maids are suffering from separation from their children (Bolante 2014). One can always avoid the feeling of guilt by pointing out that FDWs are grateful that they got the job or by claiming that he/she is treating his/her maid "as a family member". This narrative, "she is like a family member," also allows employers to overlook the gap in theirs and their maids' social and economic positions. Furthermore, this narrative allows employers to disregard maids' rights and entitlements (Cheng 2006). Structurally, the "my maid is my family" concept is characterized by mistress benevolence, which is a "false generosity" (Freire 1970), or an "ideological camouflage" (Patterson 1982) that conceals the exploitative nature of the relationship (Tappert and Dobner 2013).

An example of a narrative of comradeship between the employer and her maid as working mothers can be found in an article titled "Thank you letter to my friend, my maid".¹⁰ The author expressed appreciation of her maid for looking after her home and child. She also acknowledged that she was able to accomplish her goals because of her maid's help. The author further mentioned that the maid left her daughter with family back home and worked for her for four years. While the maid was working abroad, her child started to call her grandmother and aunt "Ibu" (Mother), and her marriage was later annulled. Upon referring to such incidents, the author gently

¹⁰ A post by Leigh Fan on an online group "theAsianparents": <https://sg.theasianparent.com/thank-you-letter-to-my-friend-my-maid> (Retrieved on October 1, 2020)

asks the maid, “do you regret it”? Further, in the form of a letter, the article concluded that the author considers the maid a friend and tells her, “Let’s work towards making both our lives everything we want it to be, and more, shall we?”.

The article recognized the maid’s sacrifices but failed to point out the inequality between the maid and her employer. If jobs in the maid’s home country paid as much as in Singapore, the maid would not have needed to emigrate nor trade her family life for financial security. By taking advantage of the wage gap between the two nations, the author could afford the freedom to pursue her career. The article’s aim may have been to remind the readers of FDWs’ sacrifice and encourage their employers to be considerate toward them since they often express frustration with FDWs. However, the article may be the author’s justification for her actions. Most of us will not let our friends sacrifice their family lives for our convenience.

It is important to note that no matter how employers feel about it, the income gap between the two parties is the main element that separates them into two different social groups. This difference enables the workers in Singapore to outsource their domestic work. A similar structure is behind other economic activities such as the fast-fashion industry. When we shop at fast-fashion outlets, unfair trade behind the low prices is not apparent, and many buy without suffering from the guilt of purchasing sweatshop products. Though the structure is similar between the fast-fashion and FDW system, employers of FDWs must deal with the misfortune that their maids manifest in their homes every day. Some simply consider the uneven relationship with their maids as part of capitalist business; after all, employers, too, are employees of their bosses.

Contradiction Felt by Female Employer

On the other hand, some female employers feel guilt in obtaining freedom through the maid’s sacrifice. In an interview with her Chinese maid documented in her book *Women’s Work*, Stack (2019) expressed her dilemma with her status as an employer of domestic workers. She was overwhelmed

by the physical and mental stress after having a baby, and she could afford to hire a maid as a way out. Those who feel guilt know that the FDWs’ situation is created by the difference in financial conditions between the two countries. For instance, if the Filipino FDWs in Singapore had Singapore nationality, they would have better opportunities. Most of them would likely be working in other occupations with much better wages.

As a response to such employers with dilemmas, there is intense criticism from human rights and equality. The reviews for Stack’s book posted on Amazon.com¹¹ criticized as “reveling in her white privilege, hired poor women to do the dirty work” (Anonymous 2019). Another reader also wrote, “She could have paid these women twice, three times the money she did. What a hypocrite” (Anonymous 2019). As Lausch (2015) points out, the lifestyle of developed countries is predicated on the exploitation of migrant labor under the current capitalist model. We must note here that these emotional criticisms may be applied to other economic activities in the current exploitative global economy, and FDW employment is just one of them.

The unique aspect of the employer-FDW dynamic compared to other global economic activities is the intense physical and emotional contact between the two parties to the transaction. As Stack struggles to justify her experience as an employer of domestic workers and wants to “forget”, this particular economic activity of purchasing convenience in daily life remains an unsettling experience for many employers. Even so, many exhausted parents without any support from their relatives or friends will not reject the idea of hiring a maid just because it is unethical. Parenting is a mentally and physically challenging task for modern nuclear families.

“Bad Maid”

Although having a maid is almost necessary to make ends meet in many Singaporean working families, many employers feel discomfort seeing the gap between them and their maids and feel guilty about their maids’ low wages and social status. One of the employers interviewed stated that she

¹¹ https://www.amazon.com/Womens-Work-Reckoning-Home-ebook/dp/B07FBZCX38/ref=sr_1_7?dchild=1&keywords=women%27s+work&qid=1632897755&sr=8-7#customerReviews (Retrieved on November 7, 2020)

realized that employing a maid in her house is detrimental to her children's moral aspect. She and her husband decided not to hire another maid when their maid returned to the Philippines. Another female participant was an expat mother from Japan. She said that she does not want to hire a maid after seeing how other expats treat their maids; she disagrees with the practice of having FDWs, which is common and seldom questioned in modern Singaporean culture.

Being aware of the criticism and moral qualms stemming from the unethical employment of FDWs, employers seem to welcome any kind of justification for the way they treat their maids. While most academic publications focus on FDWs' poor working conditions, one of the major topics of daily conversation among Singaporeans is their maids' mistakes or FDWs' misbehavior as reported on the news. For instance, an online community, "theAsianparent", shares its members' experiences and feelings. The community's Facebook page shares numerous "horror stories" from the news and members' personal experiences. Apart from SNS, local media reports incidents of abusive or criminal FDWs. A local newspaper reported a case of child abuse by a Filipino domestic worker who hit her employer's children's private parts with a rubber band to punish them for bed-wetting.¹² Such cases created a "bad maid" narrative in society. As a result, it may reduce employers' guilty feelings since the narrative tells of the lower qualities of FDWs and justifies their low status in Singaporean society.

Moreover, when employers talk about "bad maid" stories, they often speak with anger and disgust. It may be the general stress of having a person with a different culture in the household; it is frustrating to encounter different common-sense regarding house chores and daily routines. From my experience as an employer of FDWs in Singapore, another reason behind the anger may be the stress of one's ethical qualms regarding the situation. Stack (2019) also documented her mixed emotions of frustration, anger, and guilt. Such a complicated psychological relationship between employers and FDWs needs

further study.

Children Feel Closer to FDWs: Guilt and Jealous

This section focuses on the Singaporean children looked after by FDWs to clarify their relationships with the maids. Singaporean employers avoid questions such as "are the children spending more time with the maids than with us?" or "are we treating our maids ethically in front of our children?". Many employers may prefer to save time by making their maids take care of their children and limit the maids' freedom to maximize their labor output. In an interview with a Singaporean babysitter who takes care of infants at her home, she shared a story of a working mother who lives just a few blocks away from her apartment. The mother leaves her baby with the babysitter from Monday morning until Friday evening and does not even see the baby after work during the weekdays. Also, there had been several weekends where parents wanted to go on a holiday without their baby, and the baby ended up staying at the babysitter's place for two weeks. The babysitter told the interviewer that such parenting is not rare in Singaporean family culture. With my personal experience of living in Singapore for seven years with my young children, I assume that Singaporean society allows parents to rely heavily on outsourced childcare.

When childcare is part of the job, FDWs in Singapore often spend more time with their employers' children than the children's parents. As a result, many children feel emotionally close to the maids. For instance, when the Singaporean swimmer, Joseph Schooling, won the gold medal in Rio de Janeiro in 2016, he publicly expressed his gratitude for his Filipino FDW Yoland Pascual for supporting him from his childhood. The heartwarming story was made into a TV ad for the telecommunication company Singtel (Singtel, 2015). Pascual equally expressed her affection toward him in a newspaper interview, proudly telling the reporter that she has always given him a massage whenever he is tired, and she still does.¹³ Also, in the movie *Ilo Ilo/Pa ma bu zap jia* (2013), which portrayed an average

¹² <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/courts-crime/filipino-maid-jailed-for-ill-treating-employers-three-young-daughters> (Retrieved on September 29, 2021)

¹³ <https://www.straitstimes.com/sport/champ-will-always-be-his-auntie-vollys-waterboy> (Retrieved on January 14, 2021)

Singaporean family with a Filipino maid, the family's child shows a stronger emotional tie to the maid than to his own mother. Since the movie was the semi-autobiographical story of the director Anthony Chen,¹⁴ sentimental scenes such as the boy cutting the maid's hair to remember her scent should be understood as close to the reality of children's feelings.

Apart from the Singaporean context, there are movies such as the American movie *The Help* (2011), which depicted a white girl's fight for African-American maids' rights and her strong attachment to her maid. Another movie with a more contemporary social context is *The Second Mother/Que Horas Ela Volta?* (2015); this Brazilian movie contains multiple scenes in which the maid and her employers' son have intimate physical contact as if they were truly mother-and-son.

Given that maids and children's emotional and physical intimacy is common, mothers' jealousy is anticipated. Although some fathers may envy the relationship, mothers may feel stronger jealousy because their role as mothers may seem to be replaced by their female maids. One FDW participant in the interview told of an incident when her employer's child was arguing with his mother; the child said, "You don't take care of me. It's auntie (the FDW) who raised me". When the mother was alone with the participant later that day, she cried and told the participant that she is doing her best to make time for her child. The participant comforted the employer by saying that the child would understand her later. This case shows a reverse maternalistic relationship, and in the relationship, the female employer expressed concern over her parenting. However, female employers' feelings as a mother are not always expressed straightforwardly. Though not in the Singaporean context, in his biographical article, Tizon (2017) documented his mother's words when he tried to protect his maid from his mother's abuse: "I hope you're happy now that your kids hate me."¹⁵ In his mother's words, her bitterness toward her children's attachment to the maid is expressed. Ho (2005) pointed out such mothers' resentment toward their maids and argued that such family dysfunction

is rooted in the current Singaporean success story narrative, demanding mothers to be at work and absent from children. Considering cases in other cultural contexts, the modern Singaporean economic culture may not be to blame; taking care of small children is mentally and physically demanding work. It is tempting for many exhausted parents to step away from the task even when they are unemployed. A study shows that parents spend less time with their children as the maid service price goes down (Ghosh and Lien 2002). Hence, with the Singaporean social norm, which allows parents to rely heavily on outsourced childcare, more parents are inclined to avoid their grueling parenting tasks. Besides, as Ho (2005) argued, Singaporean society prioritizes economic growth over its people's quality family time; the government offers affordable FDWs to enable Singaporean workers to focus more on work without worrying about their household chores.

Even then, most parents wish to be regarded and loved as parents by their children. Therefore, when their roles as parents were threatened by their maids, employers may attempt to fortify the hierarchical relationship between them and their maids to construct the narrative that they are the parents and the maids are simply providing their labor. Furthermore, in this narrative, emotional relationships between the maids and the children are intentionally excluded, and the value of maids' knowledge on the children's development is utterly overlooked.

"Mums and Maids" (2015)

Since the mixed sentiment of female employers is seldom discussed openly, a video released by the marketing communications firm Ogilvy & Mather in collaboration with TWC2 for Labor Day in 2015 and the ensuing public discussions offered rare and meaningful insight into employers' psychological aspects. The video showed several trios of a maid, her female employer, and the employer's child. For questions related to the child of the house, the maid always gets the correct answers, and the mother does not. The movie aimed to promote a day off for

¹⁴ https://www.washingtonpost.com/goingoutguide/movies/ilo-ilo-movie-review-family-matters-in-singapore/2014/07/16/a77961ac-07a7-11e4-bbf1-cc51275e7f8f_story.html (Retrieved on January 14, 2021)

¹⁵ <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/06/lolas-story/524490/> (Retrieved on January 10, 2021)

maids since 40 per cent of FDWs in Singapore work without a weekly day off.¹⁶ The Chief creative officer of Ogilvy & Mather Asia Pacific explained that by warning modern parents about what they are missing, they may come to consider giving a day off to their maids as an opportunity to bond with their children.¹⁷

After the short video was released, some criticized it for portraying mothers in a bad light.¹⁸ Another question posed by many was why fathers did not appear in the video, and it criticized the video for reflecting the public conception of domestic work and childcare being the woman's responsibility.¹⁹ In the comment section for the web article²⁰, some condemned the marketing company for simply aiming to win an award ("Shame on us all", 24 Apr. 2015; "Michael" 24 Apr. 2015). Among the criticisms against the video, "Lils" (24 Apr. 2015) pointed out the dilemma felt by many working women and mentioned the guilt that they already feel. Another notable comment left by "arts" (24 Apr. 2015) explained that he/she "was closer to my maid rather than my parents", and the video reminded him/her that he/she would not "repeat the same mistake that my parents did". This confession supports the reality captured in the ad and points out a significant problem among children in modern Singaporean society. Furthermore, a political viewpoint was shared by "Michael" (24 Apr. 2015) and "Chris Reed" (24 Apr. 2015); they pointed out that the video is avoiding the core issue of the FDWs because the creators do not intend to confront the government. The ad succeeded in stirring emotions around parenting, childhood memory and the structure of society. Moreover, those reactions indicate that the FDW issue is a catalyst that leads to complications in modern Singaporean society.

Conclusion

This study has tried to illustrate in the foregoing analysis the dynamics of FDWs' transient status in Singapore and how society is missing the opportunities to utilize FDWs' intellectual assets to improve children's education and well-being. FDWs spend more time with children than their parents do in many households and have valuable pieces of information on children that other actors cannot obtain. However, policymakers do not seek opinions from FDWs since that would contradict FDWs' marginalized status, which facilitates the Singaporean economy. Parents tend to avoid taking their FDWs' opinions seriously since that would endanger the hierarchical relationship with them and confirm the lack of their parental existence.

Another issue raised by this study was the lack of discussions regarding the impact on the young citizens by not accepting their "second mothers" as proper members of society. Also, even if the children are not emotionally attached to their maids, seeing how their parents treat them may affect their moral development. In the current business culture, being ethical is essential; therefore, we should strive towards developing human resources with an emphasis on morality.

Though these issues are often expressed in non-academic spheres, they are not discussed enough in the academic domain. This study suggests that short-term economic growth may cause long-term damage to society; the inclusion of FDWs as respectable members of the community would benefit the nation.

¹⁶ (Baker 2015) <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/group-behind-mums-and-maids-video-addresses-flak> (Retrieved on September 27, 2020)

¹⁷ <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/maid-knows-kid-better-than-mum-video-draws-flak-but-some-say-it-reflects-situation> (Retrieved on September 27, 2020)

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Baker 2015; Hicks 2015

²⁰ (Hicks 2015) https://www.mumbrella.asia/2015/04/ogilvys-mums-and-maids-...DdWJ1HxRShRZQpupBERHdRD5XaCPMCddUoaXiCpqGkEVSvYwK0cjsVWs?_cf chl managed tk _pmd Nh4gMSm7QFikg4Fc4SUFLekV2i0.pEgho9FFi81vjbE-1632608318-0-gqNtZGzNAyWjcnBszRUl (Retrieved on September 27, 2020)

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