

**Filipina Domestic Workers in Taiwan:**  
**Structural Constraints**  
**and**  
**Personal Resistance**

Chin-Ju Lin

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April 1999

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**To Filipina domestic workers  
who are earning livings in Taiwan**



**May this book be a faithful record  
of your hardship of working abroad**





## WORD OF THE PUBLISHER

Every day domestic workers' heard and unheard voices sufferings abound. "My employer shouted at me for obviously no reasons," complained recently Aida in shock and disbelief. In such a tense situation it is almost impossible to find the right answer as the migrant, uprooted in a foreign land, never had been prepared for such an emotional challenge.

Having followed up the plight of the housemaids for the last years I feel the urgent need to present them "*Filipina Domestic Workers in Taiwan: Structural Constraints and Personal Resistance*" as a practical guideline for help and counselling in order to ease anxiety and to shorten their sleepless nights. This publication had been especially edited for the Filipina domestic workers and made easily readable through special charts and illustrations.

Graduated in sociology in 1995 from National Taiwan University its Taiwanese author Ms. Jean Chin-ju Lin gained with this masterly thesis an MA degree in Gender, Culture and Society in 1998 at Department of Sociology, University of Essex, England. The mentioned self-declared feminist currently is there a Ph.D. candidate conducting research on "The Transformation of the Family and Marriage in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Taiwan".

Among other reasons committed Ms. Chin-ju Lin took up this research to represent the subjective experiences of Filipina domestic workers, which were rarely found in previous studies. May her hope be fulfilled that this research would contribute to people's political awareness on female migrant workers' working rights. In an outline Ph.D. candidate Lin stressed: "My analysis and interpretation on this issue came from fieldwork observation and my own points of view."

Now it is up to the addressed readers to make use of these data and arguments as bases for debates or further exploration stemming from their own experiences. We would be quite grateful to hear your immediate comments, suggestions and critical voices in order to put in more efforts and to initiate changes to the benefit of all domestic workers. Above all I wish you will enjoy reading "your book".

Yvonne Lin Mei-Jung, Co-ordinator,  
Taiwan Grassroots Women Workers' Centre

Taipei, 20 April 1999



## Preface

This book was a dissertation for my Master degree in Gender, Culture and Society at the University of Essex, U.K. 1997. I started with the question of how I, as a Taiwanese feminist, should perceive issues of Filipina domestic workers' working in Taiwan. As previous literature seemed to be very unsatisfactory, I started first-hand interviews and fieldwork right away. At first, I hoped that I could represent Filipina workers' subjective experiences. However, it gradually appeared to me that I could not talk about their experiences without concerning the social and legal status in which they found themselves in Taiwan. Eventually, this research ended up with analysis from both macro and micro perspectives to represent the working experiences of Filipina domestic workers in Taiwan. Although I was content with this result, I feel that this research has opened up issues that need further exploration, such as the political economy of global labor migration, women and international politics, gender divisions of labor and workers' working rights cross-nationally. I hope this book can contribute to people's understanding of the situation of Filipina workers in Taiwan and stimulate more dialogue on this issue. Moreover, I will be glad if workers find the analysis useful in understanding the structural forces that make you suffer and powerless, and thus forge personal strengths for collective resistance.

I am in debt to Professor Miriam Glucksmann and Dr. Jane Hindley at the University of Essex for their instruction on this research. Special thanks go to Yvonne Lin and Willi Boehi at Taiwan Grassroots Women Workers' Center for suggestions on publication. I am also grateful to my parents' persistent support for my study. Last but not least, I am deeply indebted to all the interviewees: without your help, this research could not have been completed.

## Abstract

This research is set out to delineate the social position of Filipina domestic workers in Taiwan from both macro and micro levels to answer the question of 'whether Filipina domestic workers are victims or winners in international labour migration.' A multi-level analysis has been adopted to achieve this goal. Drawing on newspapers, official statistics, primary material gathered in the fieldwork, and twenty six interviews with Filipina and domestic workers, employers, brokers, NGOs, Taiwanese maids, and a government official, this exploratory research not only investigates the structural mechanisms that control Filipina domestic workers' lives, but also delineates Filipina workers' subjective resistance to this unfair social system.

The Filipina domestic workers in this study are generally young, educated migrant women. They seek work abroad due to the economic crisis in the Philippines. In Taiwan, their legal status is regulated by discriminatory laws, and thus lacks labor protection. Taiwanese public discourse constantly connects them with disorder and diseases. Moreover, they are perceived by Taiwanese employers and brokers as secondary human beings and thus have limited working rights. Although their working conditions are poor, they undermine the working opportunities of Taiwanese workers. What lies unseen behind the competing relationships between both groups are their common disadvantages as working class women in Taiwan. However, unlike Taiwanese workers who have accepted the class hierarchy, Filipina workers' class identity is still being formulated. Within the households, Filipina maids are subordinated to the gender, class and ethnic hierarchy in Taiwanese society. They carry out degrading domestic labor. When they work, they are not only under the unequal power relations as a lower-class, but also downgraded as a Filipina maid as they are constantly associated with dirt and uncivilization. They use professional knowledge, English or the idea of going home, as a way of resisting or coping with these degrading working experiences. Family, Filipino friends and the church give them support. However, their limited resources and unprivileged legal status leave them without organizing to fight for their own rights.

I conclude that Filipina domestic workers are neither victims nor winners in international labor migration. Structural controlling mechanisms restrict their power. Their positions in Taiwan society are shaped and disadvantaged by their ethnicity and gender. There is only a limited space for them to fulfil their dreams of earning big money in Taiwan.

## CONTENTS

WORD OF THE PUBLISHER/1

Preface/2

Abstract/3

## INTRODUCTION

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES OF THIS RESEARCH/6

FIELDWORK AND RESOURCES/7

REFLECTIONS ON FIELDWORK/8

ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK/10

TERMINOLOGY IN THIS BOOK/10

## CHAPTER ONE: SETTING THE CONTEXTS IN TAIWAN

BACKGROUNDS/12

THE DEBATE ON THE FOREIGN DOMESTIC WORKER POLICY/13

PUBLIC DISCOURSES AGAINST FOREIGN DOMESTIC WORKER POLICY/15

1. *Social costs*

2. *Family problems*

3. *Management difficulties*

4. *Social injustice*

THE NEGATIVE IMAGES OF FILIPINA DOMESTIC WORKERS IN NEWSPAPERS/16

THE DISCRIMINATORY LAWS AND THE ABSENCE OF LABOR PROTECTION/16

1. *Salary deduction*

2. *Termination of working contract*

3. *Overwork*

4. *Lack of health insurance*

5. *Physical and mental abuse*

\*\*How to protect yourself: A Reminder for Filipina domestic workers/19

## CHAPTER TWO

### COMING FROM THE PHILIPPINES TO WORK AS A MAID IN TAIWAN

BACKGROUNDS OF INTERVIEWEES/21

Table 1. Backgrounds of Filipina domestic workers in this research/22

MIGRANT EXPERIENCES/22

THE GENDERED AND RACIALIZED RECRUITMENT PROCESS/25

\*\*Words for Filipina domestic workers: about brokers and employers/29

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE COMPETING RELATIONSHIPS OF FILIPINA AND TAIWANESE DOMESTIC WORKERS

WORKING CONDITIONS OF FILIPINA DOMESTIC WORKERS/30

1. *Work contents*

2. *Work schedules*

3. *Welfare: days off, sickness leave, and holidays*

4. *Sexual harassment*

5. *Salary and salary deduction*

6. *Supervision*

7. *Food and accommodation*

TAIWANESE DOMESTIC WORKERS/33

WORKING CONDITIONS OF TAIWANESE DOMESTIC WORKERS/34

COMPARISON OF DOMESTIC WORKERS OF DIFFERENT ETHNICITY/35

Table 2. The comparison of Filipina and Taiwanese domestic workers' working conditions/37

## CHAPTER FOUR

### POWER RELATIONS WITHIN THE HOUSEHOLD:

#### THE INTERSECTION OF GENDER, CLASS AND ETHNICITY

ARE WE SISTERS IN STRUGGLE?/40

*When labor for love becomes paid work.../42*

*When the domestic work is performed by a live-in Filipina maid.../43*

*If Love/Sex + Labor = Wife, what's the difference between us?/44*

**\*\*Tips for Filipina domestic workers: how to face moody accusations from the employer?/46**

RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN HOUSEHOLDS: CLASS DISTINCTION AND CLASS FORMULATION/46

*Relationships between women: businesslike and emotional control patterns/46*

*"We are a family, aren't we?"/48*

**\*\*Take domestic work as a profession/50**

DOWNGRADED AS A FILIPINA MAID

*Working without dignity/51*

*Struggling to work with dignity/52*

*Support and resistance/53*

**\*\*A reminder for workers: establish your social network/55**

### CONCLUSION

*Limitations of this research/56*

### APPENDIXES

#### APPENDIX I

*Whom can you turn to? Useful information for Filipina domestic workers/58*

#### APPENDIX II

*Interview guidelines for Filipina domestic workers/61*

#### APPENDIX III

*Interview guidelines for employers/63*

#### APPENDIX IV

*Table.3 Family structures of the households/64*

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

ENGLISH LITERATURE/65

CHINESE LITERATURE/67

NEWSPAPERS/68

The Taiwan Grassroots Women Workers' Centre/69



## Introduction

### ***Research questions and objectives of this research***

There are two contradictory images of Filipina domestic workers in Taiwan. One is that these workers are victims of Taiwanese society; they suffer from triple oppressions of their ethnicity, gender and class. The other is that Filipina domestic workers work in Taiwan to fulfil their economic needs so that both Filipina domestic workers and the families that employ them are winners in international labor migration. In this research, rather than draw a quick conclusion to these two extremes, I seek to answer the question of whether Filipina domestic workers are victims or winners in international labor migration by looking at different dimensions related to the Foreign Domestic Worker policy in Taiwan.

This is an exploratory study since previous research on the subject of Filipina domestic workers in Taiwan falls into three categories:

- (1) Empirical first hand information of religious institutions or NGOs, aimed at practical action to help Filipino workers. This area of study focuses mainly on abused and illegal workers.
- (2) Taiwanese government studies on how to manage and control the quantity and quality of foreign workers. Studies in this area are mainly based on statistical analysis and perspectives from employers.
- (3) Taiwanese feminist studies discussing foreign domestic worker policy and its connection with Taiwanese women's participation in the labor force. In these studies, Taiwanese women's interests are addressed but not those of Filipina domestic workers. The Filipina domestic workers' interests appear in the first category but are totally ignored in the second and third categories. Unlike the approach adopted in the first category, which focuses on the abused or illegal domestic workers, this research will look at legal workers. I will examine the issue of Filipina domestic workers in Taiwan from both macro and micro perspectives to transcend the binary opposites of victims or winners. On the one hand, I will explore the social positions of Filipina domestic workers by looking at their legal status in Taiwan and the social construction of their images in the eyes of Taiwanese people. On the other hand, I will also present the narratives from Filipina domestic workers about their migration and working experiences to show their subjectivity and resistance. In order to discuss the power relations involved in the realm of foreign domestic worker policy in specific contexts, I choose to look at the competing relationships between Filipina and Taiwanese domestic workers and the interpersonal relationships between Filipina domestic workers and their employers. Within these two domains, I will argue that gender, ethnicity and class are the prominent factors that formulate the interests of different actors and that restrict the power of Filipina domestic workers.

This research will provide an implication for further thinking on political changes of Filipina domestic workers in Taiwan and will be a start point to build a theoretical framework where gender, ethnicity and class intersect to explain multi-oppressive forces of other groups of people in the contexts of Taiwan. Moreover, it also helps to

re-think the differences between women, not only class differences but also ethnic differences. Furthermore, this helps to recognize the structural forces that make relationships among different women become competing and tentative. Finally, the irony of paid and unpaid domestic work, the intersection of class and ethnic differences in domestic labor also help to re-think the nature of domestic labor and how domestic labor should be done and by whom.

### ***Fieldwork and resources***

This research provides a multi-level analysis of the position of Filipina domestic workers in Taiwan, based on primary material gathered in fieldwork and interviews with Filipina and Taiwanese domestic workers, employers, brokers, and a government official. The fieldwork was conducted in several ways. First, in order to know workers' Sunday activities and to talk to them about their working conditions, I made observations on Filipina workers at St. Christopher's Catholic Church, Taipei train station, and Chiang Kai Shek Memorial Hall, where many foreign workers gathered on Sundays. I then conducted four interviews with Filipina domestic workers. Moreover, I attended mass in a Catholic Church in Shin-Den to get to know Filipina domestic workers there and conducted in-depth interviews with three of them.

Second, in order to depict a clear picture of the interaction between domestic workers and their employers, I conducted ten interviews; five paired sets of employers and workers. The households I chose were through introductions by my friends and relatives. They had no connection with each other and nor did they represent particular types of household. Finally, three females, one male and one couple employers, and their domestic workers were interviewed. Of the five domestic workers, only one was interviewed together with the couple so that I had an inkling of insight into her situation. The other four domestic workers were interviewed separately from their employers. However, they tended to talk much about their migration and adapting experiences and avoided the topics about the interpersonal relationships with their employers. On the contrary, the employers expressed their opinions without any reservation. This reflects the unequal powers of the employee-employer relationships in the household.

Third, in order to discover how the placement agencies perceived foreign domestic workers, I contacted six of them that recruited foreign domestic workers, and gathered advertisements and magazines published by them. It was difficult to interview the brokers if there were no business interests for them, so I visited a placement agency in Kaohsiung, South Taiwan, through the introduction of my friend who worked in that agency. At this interview, both employer and her employees were present.

Fourth, in order to compare the treatment of Filipina and Taiwanese domestic workers, and to explore the competing relationships between them, I also visited a placement agency that specialized in Taiwanese domestic service. There were around ten unemployed Taiwanese domestic workers waiting there for job opportunities. The

broker explained the rise and fall of her business and introduced these workers to me. Then, I interviewed three of these workers in the placement agency.

Fifth, I carried out participant observation for two weeks as a volunteer worker in the Migrant Workers' Concern Desk, a Catholic organization aimed at helping migrant workers and promoting workers' rights. As part of my fieldwork, I regularly visited the Shan-shia detention center once a week with a group of Catholic workers for a month. From this experience, I reached a better understanding about the cases of illegal and abused workers and the process of how legal workers became illegal. Then, I interviewed organizers of Taiwan Grass-roots Women Workers' Center, Migrant Workers' Concern Desk, and Hope Workers' Center. They shared the experiences of helping migrant workers with me and helped me to understand the intricacies of the legal system, which positions foreign workers as a cheap and obedient labor force. Then, this point was proved when I interviewed the former Vice Minister of the Council of Labor Affairs. His opinions helped me to understand the stances and priorities of the government when making policies on foreign workers.

In summary, the fieldwork of four weeks included interviews twelve Filipina domestic workers, five employers of Filipina domestic workers, one placement agency specialized in foreign domestic workers, one recruitment agency specialized in Taiwanese domestic workers, three Taiwanese domestic workers, four organizers of three NGOs, and one former Vice Minister of the Council of Labor Affairs. This book was written up on the basis of these interviews, field notes, materials that I gathered in the fieldwork, official statistics and newspapers.

### ***Reflections on fieldwork***

It took time to get into the world of Filipina domestic workers. I distinguished two stages of my research. At the first stage, I was not familiar with Filipina workers and their working conditions. The interview contents were usually a brief description of the household they worked for; their working schedules, workloads, migration process, and their supporting network. They felt secure to reveal facts to me. One worker, Sally, was obviously abused and she expressed her suffering when describing the unreasonable working criteria of her employer. The other workers had relatively positive attitudes towards their treatment in Taiwan, regardless of the facts that they had a long and painful adapting period and worked more than 12 hours a day.

At the second stage, that is after I worked in the Migrant Workers' Concern Desk for a week and interviewed four workers on Sundays, I had clearer ideas of Filipina domestic workers' lives in Taiwan. My understanding of their lives promoted their willingness to reveal their feelings and thoughts to me. Facts, e.g. how much they earned, how long they worked and what were their duties, etc. became less important in the interviews. At this stage, the interview contents varied depending on the interviewing context. When interviewed within the households no matter the employer was around or not, the topics were restricted in their migration process and adapting experiences. When interviewed after mass in the church and through the introduction

of Nancy, one of my interviewees, their subjectivity and power relations with their employers came out quite clearly. I regarded the three interviews that I carried out at the church through the introduction of Nancy as most successful.

The different contents not only resulted from the interviewing contexts, but also related to their and my class, gender and ethnicity. The character of the three most successful interviews was that all the women had graduated from university and had worked as a respected businesswoman, a teacher, and a nurse. The shared common class and gender between us, as I am a single middle class woman and seldom-engaged in domestic labor, facilitated our communication. I could empathize their difficulties of entering the degraded position as maids that Taiwanese employers assigned to them; and they felt it easy to talk to me about these experiences. In contrast, in the cases of Filipina domestic workers whose education levels were about high school, I found it difficult to address the issue of their class and ethnic differences with their employers when interviewing them.

However, the class differences did not cause serious communication difficulties between Taiwanese domestic workers and me since we shared the same gender and ethnicity. Although my research focused on Filipina domestic workers, the most striking experience occurred to me when I interviewed several Taiwanese domestic workers. I was deeply moved by their life histories that showed how unprivileged they were in such a sexist society. My understanding of Taiwanese domestic workers and middle class women did not differ very much because my life experiences were connected with both groups of women. However, the class differences, which made me appear to have more resources than they did, had influenced the interviews. I was expected to report their suffering and misfortune as unemployed domestic workers, which dramatized their narratives.

Ethnic differences clearly made some obstacles at the first stage of my research but they seemed to have limited influence in the latter interviews. At first, a Taiwanese transgressing the boundary to talk with them was somehow very odd to them, but the ethnic differences between us were soon replaced by using common language: English. English facilitated our communication because from their experiences of working in Taiwanese households, few Taiwanese could speak fluent English. Filipina workers did not have persistently negative attitudes to Taiwanese; rather they considered the distances between them were caused by language differences. Many interviewees also felt that there were not many differences between Filipino and Taiwanese, in accordance with the appearance, household structure, and kinship relationships, etc.

However, at the second stage of my research, I found English had its limitation. I used to join Nancy and her friends for dinner in the McDonald's after mass each Sunday. Most of the time, they talked in their national language, Tagalog, and I could only understand them when they spoke English or when they translated it to me. I started to realize that I could only understand the part of their lives that they felt ready to tell me. After spending time socializing with them, I also found out several inconsistencies with what workers told me at interviews about their family. Although it was not

directly related to my research interests, it certainly took more time to establish rapport in order to understand workers' lives thoroughly. Nevertheless, constrained by time and language difficulty, this research could only provide perspectives on Filipina domestic workers' working lives, rather than a complete representation of their lives in Taiwan. Although the language, rather than ethnicity, had more significant influences in the interviews in such a short time of conducting research, I believe that ethnicity will appear to have more influences as the research goes into depth. For example, the ambiguous position as a Taiwanese researcher makes it difficult to participate in the working process either as a family member or as a domestic worker.

### ***Organization of this book***

In order to examine the different dimensions involved in the issue of Foreign Domestic Worker policy in Taiwan, I have organized this book into the following chapters. The first chapter is set out to depict social and legal backgrounds of Foreign Domestic Worker policy, which shapes Filipina domestic workers' social status in Taiwan and constrains their working rights structurally. The second chapter deals with workers' migrant experiences: Who are they? How and why do they go to Taiwan? How do they get this job? It will be followed by an analysis of the views of brokers and employers who are involved in the migrant process. Chapter three will present the working conditions of Filipina domestic workers in comparison with those of Taiwanese workers to elaborate how the structural forces shape the competing relations between these two socially disadvantaged groups of women in Taiwan. In chapter four, I will analyze the interpersonal interactions between employers and Filipina domestic workers in the household to demonstrate how power is subtly exercised along with gender ideology, and class and ethnic differences. The four chapters are interconnected but could be read independently. They, as a whole, delineate the social positions and working lives of Filipina domestic workers in Taiwan. Finally, I will draw conclusions that Filipina domestic workers are neither victims nor winners in the Foreign Domestic Worker policy. The structural controlling mechanism restricts their power, and their positions in Taiwan society have been shaped and disadvantaged by their ethnicity and gender. Although many Filipina domestic workers struggle for empowerment in their daily lives, they have limited resources to fight for their own rights. Therefore, no one can ever be sure of whether Filipina workers' dreams of earning big money in Taiwan could be fulfilled.

### ***Terminology in this book***

In this book, four groups of terms, i.e. domestic worker/domestic helper/ domestic caretaker<sup>1</sup>; foreign domestic worker/Filipina domestic worker; Filipino/Filipina, and domestic worker/maid should be clarified.

In Taiwan, there are both domestic helpers and domestic caretakers. The former are responsible for housework and the care of children and the elderly while the latter are

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<sup>1</sup> Although in British English, a 'caretaker' means a janitor, the term 'caretaker' is used in Taiwan to refer to a care assistant. In this book, I adopt the latter meaning since it has a prevailing usage in both official and private documents in Taiwan.

mainly responsible for taking care of patients or disabled persons in the household. There is quota limitation for recruiting domestic helpers but no limitation for caretakers according to the present policy of the Government. Therefore, many households make applications nominally for a domestic caretaker but mean a domestic helper. In this research, I use the term domestic worker to include both domestic helpers and domestic caretakers because in practice they are expected to perform similar tasks, are regulated by the same laws, and fall into the same legal category.

According to official statistics, there were 243,535 foreign workers legally in Taiwan in May 1997 (CLA, 1997). However, the population of foreign workers, including illegal workers, had been estimated as more than 450,000, exceeding that of the Aborigines (about 370,000) in Taiwan (Commercial Times, 14/02/96). At present, the Taiwan government only allows the recruitment of foreign workers from Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines. The number of legal foreign domestic workers, including domestic helpers and caretakers, was about 40,000 in May 1997. Most of them are Filipinos because they can speak English. Therefore, the foreign domestic worker is a wider category than the Filipino domestic worker is.

‘Filipina’ is the feminine form of ‘Filipino’. Although 5% of the domestic helpers in Taiwan were male (CLA, 1997: 102), this research only focuses on female domestic workers and excludes male ones. Some discussions about legal status can also apply to male domestic workers but I only interviewed female workers and the arguments were built on the basis of their sex as female. Therefore, this book is entitled ‘Filipina domestic workers in Taiwan’ rather than ‘Filipino’.

I use the terms ‘domestic workers’ and ‘maids’ interchangeably but there is still some distinction in my usage of them: when I refer to their working conditions and legal status, emphasizing their roles as workers, I use the term ‘domestic worker’; when discussing their status in the household or relationships with employers, I use the term ‘maid’ to make the unequal power relations between them prominent.



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## Chapter One: Setting the Contexts in Taiwan

### **Backgrounds**

Taiwan, a small island with a total land area of 35,775 sq. kms. and with a population of 21,000,000, is a newly industrialized country in East Asia. The Government of the Republic of China took over Taiwan from the Japan in 1945 to which Taiwan was ceded in 1895. Now, Chinese Han culture dominates this island whereas there is only 1.7% Aborigines, who have inhabited in Taiwan before Chinese migration in 16th century, and are of Malayo-Polynesian ethnolinguistic origin.

After the rapid industrialization in 1950s, Taiwan has become one of the 'four dragons' of Asia, together with Hong Kong, Singapore, and South Korea. In 1997, the per capita GNP has reached US \$ 13,819 (Executive Yuan, R.O.C., 1997).<sup>2</sup> Women have contributed greatly to the rapid economic development of the past fifty years. On the one hand, levels of female employment increased dramatically from 1966 because their labor was cheaper than men's (Cheng and Hsiung, 1993). On the other hand, women work not only as unpaid workers for families or family businesses but also in informal sectors earning low salaries for family expenditure. In 1997, the rate of female participation in the labor force is 46.2%, which is still much lower than western countries.

Since the 1980s, the comparatively high level of economic development in Taiwan has attracted migrant workers mainly from Asia to work in Taiwan. Many came to Taiwan with visitor's visas and stayed in Taiwan illegally to work after their visa expired (Lee, 1995:1-3). Not until working permission was first granted by the government in 1989 and the 'Employment Service Act' enacted in 1992, migrant workers had gained legal employment status in Taiwan.

In March 1992, the government opened the door to foreign domestic caretakers for families with severely disabled members without quota limitation. Moreover, from August 1992 till December 1995, the government introduced a quota of 16,000 domestic helpers to the family with young children and elderly relatives. In 1997, there were already 19,531 legal domestic caretakers and 14,542 legal domestic helpers in Taiwan (CLA, June 1997).<sup>3</sup>

Over the past ten years, there have been heated discussions as to whether Taiwan should 'introduce'<sup>4</sup> migrant workers. By the time the government legislated laws for foreign workers, several women's group demonstrated to urge legalization for foreign

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<sup>2</sup>US \$ 1 = NT \$ 28.6 in September 1997 NT. means New Taiwan Dollars.

<sup>3</sup> The latest official statistics show that the total amount of foreign domestic workers in Taiwan are 53368 in December 1998 (CLA, January 1999).

<sup>4</sup>The term 'introduce' here is a very problematic but widely used concept in these discussions. 'Introduce' to some extent, means there is something new and which did not exist, and then it is 'introduced' into this society. However, Filipina domestic workers have worked in Taiwan for almost ten years, with no law applied for application. Therefore, the term 'introduce' can not reflect its reality. But, to some extent, it is right in the sense that Taiwanese were 'introducing' a new recruiting system.



domestic workers. I will examine two sets of issues that were aired in the media. First, the debates about the desirability of employing foreign domestic workers to carry on domestic labor which were unpaid work. Second, the negative attitudes towards Filipina maids. I will show how these discussions are gendered and how the images of Filipina domestic workers are racialized.

### ***The debate on the foreign domestic worker policy***

In 1991, the crackdown on illegal foreign workers aroused demonstrations to urge the legalization of foreign domestic workers. Several women's groups were involved, such as the Modern Women's Foundation, the Etiquette Society of the Republic of China, the Taipei Social Bureau Women's Service Corps, the Mother's Classroom of Kang-Fu Community, the Women's Corps of Police Volunteers, the Lions Club, etc. (China Times, 24/02/91). Their argument was that foreign domestic workers were treasures of every family, not a disease of Taiwanese society. They presented a common statement to push the government to legalize foreign domestic workers and to manage the placement agencies. They argued that these workers could solve the problem of childcare and widen women's participation in the labor force. (China Times, 24/02/91). These women focused on their immediate needs to unburden their responsibilities of domestic work. They therefore regarded foreign domestic workers as a solution to their toil.

Their opinions were criticized by both conservative men and feminists. One veteran wrote to a female legislator who was putting pressure on the Government to 'import' foreign domestic workers, *'If you were too busy to undertake your domestic work, why not go back to your previous job?'*<sup>5</sup> (Taiwan Times, 14/03/91). This man was against foreign domestic workers because he believed domestic labor should be every woman's responsibility. From his viewpoint, the women who argued for employing foreign domestic workers had disobeyed the traditional gendered division of labor because they wished to develop careers for themselves. In his article, both ethnic and class justice, such as oppressing women of other ethnicity, and benefiting wealthy families, have been used to confirm his traditional idea of the gendered division of labor.

It is interesting to note that the ethnic and class justice also appeared in Taiwanese feminist arguments. Feminists radically challenged the idea that domestic work is women's work and also criticized the idea that women supporting legalization were putting Taiwanese women's burdens onto migrant women. A famous feminist scholar Lee Yuan-zhen wrote a newspaper article on women's policies and foreign domestic workers, arguing that only families with high incomes can afford to employ these workers. The system of foreign domestic workers, which was seen as a residue of slavery, should be avoided; and the government should promote part-time work and a better childcare system to solve working women's burdens (Lee, 1991).

By taking the opportunity to discuss the Foreign Domestic Worker (FDW) policy, Taiwanese feminists criticized the government for never trying to design women's

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<sup>5</sup> The legislator's previous job was a news reporter that was regarded by the veteran as more feminine than a legislator was, so that she would have more time to undertake 'her' domestic labor.

employment policies. They argued that FDW policy benefited only few rich women, reduced the working opportunities of Taiwanese domestic workers, and ignored the general needs of Taiwanese working women. They were against FDW policy because (1) it did not promote levels of female employment since it did not promote women's employment rights, (2) it did not free women from the responsibility of domestic and care work; rather, they suggested that the child/elderly care facilities should be provided by the state. Therefore, by the way of examining FDW policy, most feminists shifted their focus from FDW policy to women's employment policy. It was argued that if the government wished to promote women's participation in the labor force, the FDW policy is not an adequate way. Rather, the following methods should be adopted: first, the government should establish a child/elderly care system (Hu, 1997:8); second, the government should pass Equal Opportunity Legislation for Men and Women<sup>6</sup> in order to promote women's employment rights (Hu, 1997:12). And finally, they demanded holistic policy to promote women's participation in the labor force, taking into account part-time work, flexible-working time, childcare within enterprises, etc. (Wang, 1997:13). They suggested that since both the foreign domestic worker policy and women's policies took time to map out, it was better to make efforts on the latter.

However, in these arguments, few feminists addressed class differences between women. The welfare provisions for example, the childcare system within enterprises, maternal leave, equal opportunities, were mentioned as if they would benefit all women in general. The only exception was Hu's article 'From the trap of women's needs and employment to the discussion of implications of Foreign Domestic Worker policy' (1997: 6-10), distinguished the different needs of women of different classes. She explained that both middle-class and working class women were forced to leave the labor market due to both the sexual discrimination and the cultural norms of being a mother. Higher and middle-class women could afford to be full-time housewives, while lower class women were forced to enter informal sectors due to urgent economic needs. The former needed equal opportunities in the labor market whereas the latter badly needed the child/elderly care facilities.

These debates promoted consensus about women's labor policies among feminist groups. They also helped feminists to sense the class differences between women, which had rarely been discussed in Taiwan. Taiwanese feminists focused very much on the gender inequality in Taiwan, and began to address class differences between women, but ignored the issue of ethnic difference. Filipina domestic workers never became the subject of discussion: why they came to Taiwan, how they felt, what were their working conditions, etc. All the discussions revealed the idea that the interests of Taiwanese women were prior to those of Filipinas'. They ignored the fact that there were already 15,000 to 20,000 Filipino workers in Taiwan in 1991. This is not incidental; it reflects Taiwanese xenophobia, which will be presented in the following section.

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<sup>6</sup> for which feminists have fought for eight years.

### ***Public discourses against foreign domestic worker policy***

According to the survey and opinions in newspapers, most people were against the idea of 'introducing' foreign domestic workers. In August 1991, the Council of Labor Affairs conducted the survey *Statistical Report on Opinions toward Alien Maids and on Status and Market Conditions of Domestic Maids*. It showed only 15.5% agreed to open the door to foreign domestic workers whereas 46.1% were against the idea of legalizing recruitment. The remaining 38.4% of people neither agreed nor disagreed. In newspapers, opinions against foreign domestic workers were based on several arguments:

#### **1. Social costs**

This was a very common argument in these opinions. Social costs meant all kinds of negative impacts or disorders that foreign workers may cause, for example: social problems caused by language or adaptive difficulties; and run-away foreign workers might disturb the order of the labor market, etc.

#### **2. Family problems**

Relationships between maids and mistresses were held to be very difficult to deal with; foreign domestic workers might cause arguments between parents-in-law and daughters-in-law, etc. Moreover, there might be sexual relationships between the employer and the maid.

#### **3. Management difficulties**

This referred to the system of placement agencies, recruitment rules, labor welfare system etc. These were considered difficult to manage due to the nature of domestic workers' working in private homes.

#### **4. Social injustice**

There were also arguments based on social justice usually adopted by feminists: to employ foreign domestic workers would benefit only rich families; the maltreatment of Filipina domestic workers in Singapore had proved that employing domestic workers was a residue of slavery.

Since 1991, public opinion has been preoccupied by the possibly negative impacts that foreign domestic workers may have. The private nature of domestic labor that may cause abuses and management difficulties has not been challenged. The impacts of foreign labor in the Taiwan labor market have happened but have not been discussed. The design of laws that caused the foreign domestic worker system become, in effect, a throwback to slavery has not been criticized by Taiwanese feminists. If the discussion of social justice stood, why was a consideration of the welfare and legal protection system absent from the debates? In other words, no one criticized and challenged the assumption that foreign domestic workers would be in the position of second-class human beings in Taiwan.

### ***The negative images of Filipina domestic workers in newspapers***

News reports were also full of negative images and assumptions concerning foreign workers before and after the legalization of foreign domestic workers in 1992. There were reports entitled '*Facing the social problems that foreign workers caused*' (Economic Daily News, 02/12/89), '*Foreign laborers commit crimes*' (United Daily News, 29/09/90), and '*Foreign maids will come, and we should avoid problems before it happens.*' etc. When Angelina, a domestic worker, killed her patient and then committed suicide on 9<sup>th</sup> Nov. 95, the newspaper entitled, '*The first case of Filipina maid killing her employer breaks out.*' (China times, 10/11/95). The words 'break out' implied that there must be something wrong taking place and everybody was waiting for problems to appear and then spread. After the Angelina case, the newspapers reported opinions of employers worried about whether their domestic workers are mentally disordered. There was no representation of the opinions of Filipina domestic workers and no discussions on how the working stress caused Angelina lose control.

Research about Filipina domestic workers also represented in newspapers in a negative way. Reports entitled, '*Superb Filipina managers may bring special troubles*' (United Daily News, 04/04/96), and '*Filipina maids at home, children change their accent and behaviors*' (Central Daily News, 01/07/96). There were also attempts to report the counter images of Filipina domestic workers. They appeared in a more descriptive and sympathetic mode (e.g. China Times, 11/11/95, United Daily News, 04/10/96). These reports focused on workers' activities and Sunday mass at St. Christopher church, their homesickness and difficulties of working abroad.

Another negative image in the newspapers is the connection of Filipina domestic workers and diseases. There was often news on diseases that Filipina workers 'bring'<sup>7</sup>: leprosy, parasitism, and amoebic dysentery, etc. One such headline read as follow: '*Please NOTICE: Your Maid May Have Parasites.*' (China Times, 22/07/97). Usually these reports would follow warnings from the Health Administration that employers should pay attention to the hygiene habits of their Filipina maids. It was represented as if Taiwan were such an advanced and clean country regardless of the diseases or occupational diseases that Filipina domestic workers may get when working in Taiwan.

### ***The discriminatory laws and the absence of labor protection***

Foreign workers in Taiwan are discriminated against by laws because of the following points that are listed in the Employment Service Law and Regulations Governing Employment and Control of Foreigners, which are the two main laws regulating them in their working period:

#### **1. Change of employer<sup>8</sup>:**

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<sup>7</sup> The term appears frequently in the newspaper. The logic behind is that they think the diseases come with foreign workers and 'pollute' Taiwanese society, which was supposed to have no such diseases.

<sup>8</sup> This regulation has been loosened since 1998. If the patient dies or the employer emigrates, the caretaker can be arranged to work as a domestic helper in the same household or transferred to a new employer. If the employer wants to terminate the contract for reasons other than the faults of the

According to the Employment Service Law in 1997, foreign domestic workers (FDWs) cannot change their employer. If they are abused by their employers and can prove abuse, they can annul the contract but cannot continue working in Taiwan. Since FDWs pay a substantial broker's fee to work in Taiwan, this is one of the reasons that cause many FDWs to decide to endure abuses.<sup>9</sup>

## **2. Health and pregnancy:**

FDWs are to have health checks every six months. These include a chest X-ray examination, and tests for pregnancy, as well as HIV antibodies, syphilis, hepatitis B, malaria, intestinal parasites, amphetamines and morphine. If they fail any of these tests, they will be repatriated immediately. It is obvious that the test for pregnancy discriminates against women and it also declares that the Taiwanese government will not bear the reproduction cost of foreign workers. Moreover, the association of foreign workers and diseases, noted above, is reinforced by these laws.

In addition, foreign workers are also regulated by the law with regard to their working period, marriage, and family. The maximum working period, stipulated in 1997, for a foreign domestic worker is three years, they are not allowed to marry during the period of the contract, and they can not bring their families to stay in Taiwan.

Thus we can see that these laws are not aimed at protecting the workers' working rights but rather at limiting the rights of foreign workers in Taiwan. The working rights of foreign domestic workers are only regulated by the working contract although some foreign workers, such as factory workers, are also protected by Labor Standards Law, which apply to all blue-collar and clerical workers in Taiwan regardless of their nationality. Since domestic workers, regardless of their nationality, are contract workers, they are not included in this law<sup>10</sup>, which means that they are not protected by minimum wage, working hours, working conditions, welfare, or sickness leave regulations. The only valid legal document is the contract of employment signed by both the foreign domestic worker and the employer. Therefore, if the employer is kind, it is the foreign worker's luck. But, if workers meet abusive employers, the legal system leaves foreign domestic workers open to abuse. The following forms of abuse are not unusual:

## **1. Salary deduction**

Although most foreign domestic workers earn the minimum wage in Taiwan, it is, however, around 30% below the wages of Taiwanese workers. The minimum wage

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worker, the worker can be transferred to a new employer. It gives workers more opportunities to work in Taiwan up to three years.

<sup>9</sup> After the stipulation of the new regulation, there are still problems. Workers are still very likely to endure abuses. Firstly, abuses in the private sphere are still difficult to prove and the Taiwanese government hesitates to intervene legally. The government prefers 'mediation' in all cases. Secondly, they might be transferred to an undesired employer. After all, they have no say in choosing an employer.

<sup>10</sup> From April 1998 to December 1998, the foreign domestic workers were included in Labor Standards Law, with conditions that their working hours, holidays, day off, and night work are subjected to working contracts that they signed. Since 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1999, domestic workers are again excluded from Labor Standards Law. In fact, the law had done little to protect their vulnerable situation.

they earn is not protected by law but by the contract. This means that if they sign a contract with wage well below the minimum wage, it is not illegal. Sometimes the employer will open a saving account for foreign domestic worker under the name of the employer<sup>11</sup>. The main purpose of doing so is to prevent the worker from escaping. In such cases, it is possible for the employer to keep the money without giving it to the worker.

## **2. Termination of working contract**

Employers have the right to terminate a contract whenever they choose while domestic workers have little say in such a decision and may have limited time for alternative arrangements.

## **3. Overwork**

There is no standard contract enforced by the government. Therefore, employers can put strict and unreasonable criteria in the contract and they will not be regulated and supervised by the government. Domestic workers could work for twenty-four hours because it is not illegal. Although it is illegal to ask the domestic worker to work for other relatives or factories of the employer, it is not unusual that domestic workers have to work for the relatives or in the factory of the employer, in addition to their domestic duties at the employer's house.

## **4. Lack of health insurance**

Health insurance<sup>12</sup> for domestic workers is not enforced. According to the surveys of the Council of Labor Affairs (1997:81), there are still 18.1 % of legal domestic workers without insurance. However, the insurance does not mean that domestic workers will receive good treatment. If they are ill or injured at work, their contract would probably be terminated and they might be sent home without any treatment.

## **5. Physical and mental abuse**

The privatized nature of domestic workers makes them vulnerable to physical and mental abuse. The greatest difficulty for foreign domestic workers is that if this happens, their isolation and lack of power give them almost no rights with which to protect themselves. Moreover, the difficulties of proving abuse make it difficult to eradicate the abuse.

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<sup>11</sup> Since 1998, the government has made into the law the practice of compulsory savings. It is now possible for the employer to open an account in the name of the worker, and 'save' 30% of her salary every month for her. However, in practice the employer usually has access to the account even though the account is under the name of the worker.

<sup>12</sup> All citizens of Taiwan and foreigners with Alien Resident Certificate are required to participate in the National Health Insurance Program. In the case of employing a foreign domestic worker, the employer is responsible for 60%, the government for 10%, and the worker for 30%.

***\*\*How to protect yourself: A Reminder for Filipina domestic workers***

**1. About salary deduction:**

- According to the law, it is not allowed for the employer to transfer the compulsory deposits into compensation.
- It is suggested by MWCD<sup>13</sup> for migrant workers to ask the employer for a deposit receipt and updated bankbook on a monthly basis.
- If you do not receive salaries at all, contact MECO, Foreign Workers' Counseling Centers and related NGOs.

2. **About the working contract:** For domestic workers, the working contract is the only legal document that can protect your rights. So, it is important to negotiate terms and conditions before you sign. Keep a copy with you and be familiar with it.
- If the employer wants to terminate the contract without your consent, negotiate for the time and contact MECO, Foreign Worker Counseling Centers or related NGOs for help. (See Appendix 1.)

3. **About severe mental and physical abuse:** physical abuse and severe mental abuse are governed by penal code. It is then, important to collect evidence by photos, tapes, or examination results from the hospital to prove abuses. Contact MECO or related NGOs for help.

4. **About health insurance:** All foreigners in Taiwan are required to join National Health Insurance. The employer is supposed to pay 60% of the fee, the worker 30% and the government 10%. You have the right to ask the employer to register you in the National Health Insurance program, and you also have the rights to see a doctor when you are sick.

5. **About overwork, insufficient days off, and lack of sickness leave:** the Taiwanese government leaves foreign domestic workers no protection in these aspects. The only thing you can do is to seek for mediation and file the complaint to MECO. (Refer information to Appendix 1.)

Several NGOs, such as the Hope Workers' Center and the Catholic Migrant Workers' Concern Desk, have tried to help vulnerable domestic workers by pushing the government to design standard working contracts, to enable workers to change employers in cases of abuse, and to protect the working conditions of domestic workers.<sup>14</sup> However, it is unlikely that the government will protect foreign domestic workers by adopting ideas from these pressure groups. There are several reasons for this that I found in my fieldwork. First, these efforts to protect and enhance the working rights of foreign domestic workers basically go against the objectives of the foreign labor policies. These policies aim to gain cheapness and obedience, which are not available from Taiwanese workers. Second, the interests of Taiwanese employers are usually prior to that of foreign domestic workers. The idea is deeply set in the

<sup>13</sup> Migrant Worker Concern Desk, *Taking the High Way*, 1997, p. 27.

<sup>14</sup> Interviews with organizers of Hope Workers' Center and Migrant Workers' Concern Desk, 01/08/97 and 21/07/97.

mind of Taiwanese government officials. When asked about the possibility of establishing a special institution for foreign workers, his answer was, '*I think the brokers and several NGOs will deal with the cases.*'<sup>15</sup> He, then, reminded me that there was also an official information center for foreign workers. However, none of these organizations have governmental authority to protect workers' rights. Finally, the department in the Council of Labor Affairs responsible for labor investigation has only three people dealing with all the employee-employer disputes in Taiwan including native and foreign workers.<sup>16</sup> This implies that the protection of workers is not a concern of the government.

Before a Filipina domestic worker entered Taiwan to work, Taiwanese society had shown negative attitudes towards them: their images has been connected with diseases and crimes, they seemed to be the symbol of disorder and were expected to raise problems for Taiwanese society. Discourses based on social justice were in fact xenophobia on the part of the Taiwanese. Foreign domestic workers were regarded as vulnerable and easily exploited, and the system of foreign domestic worker was seen as a residue of slavery. But, the system that caused their vulnerability has never been challenged. In discussion of this social policy, Taiwanese feminists, who were supposed to promote the interests of women, focused on the interests of Taiwanese women and ignored those of foreign domestic workers. The Taiwanese government, by legalizing foreign laborers to gain their cheapness and obedience, has made discriminatory laws to regulate foreign domestic workers. These laws place them as 'second-class human beings': their rights are limited and labor protection is absent. In contrast to their lack of subjectivity in this chapter, in next chapter, I will present the subjectivity of Filipina domestic workers, focusing on their migration process. Moreover, I will also look at another two important controlling mechanisms on them: the broker and the employer.



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<sup>15</sup> Interview with the former Vice Minister of Council of Labor Affairs, 12/08/97.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with the organizer of Migrant Workers' Concern Desk, 21/07/97.



## Chapter Two

# Coming from the Philippines to Work as A Maid in Taiwan

### *Backgrounds of interviewees*

For this dissertation, I conducted twelve interviews with Filipina domestic workers, of whom three were caretakers and nine were domestic helpers. According to the official statistics in August 1996, 65.66% of the foreign domestic helpers were aged 25-34, and 30.60 % aged 35-44 (CLA, 1997:18), my interviewees being mostly in the former category. Eight of them were in their 30s, three in their 20s and the oldest one was forty-one year old. It means that my sample concentrated on the younger domestic workers. Six of the twelve had gone to Taiwan when they were in their twenties. Half of the twelve were married with children in the Philippines, and half of them were still single.

As statistics shown in the same survey, 49.05 % of domestic helpers had graduated from senior high school, 38.37% had university degrees, 12.44% had graduated from junior high school (CLA, 1997:88). In my interviewees, seven had attended university courses although three of them did not complete; three graduated from college, senior high school and junior high school. The education level of the remaining two interviewees were unknown. My interviewees had higher percentage of university education, compared to that of all the domestic helpers in Taiwan.

Three of the twelve interviewees had worked abroad as domestic workers, and nine of them were going abroad for the first time as domestic workers. The period they stayed in Taiwan ranged from 2 months to 4 years. However, only one had stayed longer than 2 years and had thus become an illegal worker. Half of them stayed in Taiwan more than one year but less than two years. According to the regulations effective from July 1997, foreign domestic workers can work in Taiwan for two years, and extend the contract for one year more if both parties agree. After three years, they can no longer return to work in Taiwan.

*Table 1. Backgrounds of Filipina domestic workers in this research*

Name <sup>17</sup>	Age	Marriage <sup>18</sup> , Children <sup>19</sup>	Education	Previous job	First abroad	Period in Taiwan	Age on arrival
Nancy	30s	M, 4	University (not	Office job, Domestic	No	10 months	30s

<sup>17</sup> Names that appear in the book are all changed to protect the interviewees.

<sup>18</sup> S means single, and M means married.

<sup>19</sup> Numbers of Children.

			completed)	worker in Hong Kong			
Judy	31	S,	University	Student	Yes	3 years, 6 months	27
Marina	31	M, 3	College	Housekeeper	Yes	2 years	29
Grace	31	M, 4	University (not completed)	Housekeeper	Yes	2 years	29
Rose-marie	30s	M, 3	Junior high and vocational course	Owning a Beauty salon	Yes	1 year, 7 months	30s
Lily	35	S	Senior high school	Domestic worker in Malaysia	No	2 months	35
Leona	30s	S		Telephone secretary	Yes	More than 1 year	30s
Linda	27	S	University (not completed)	Student	Yes	1 year	26
Sally	34	M, 1		Domestic worker in Middle East	No	11 months	33
Lucy	29	S	University	Nurse, Quality Assurance	Yes	1 year, 7 months	27
Regina	41	M, 2	University	Running her business	Yes	10 months	40
Lorna	26	S	University	Teacher in Kindergarten	Yes	1 year, 2 months	25

### ***Migrant experiences***

The Philippines' economy is burdened with severe foreign debt. In the Marcos period (1965-1985), corruption and failure of crony businesses caused the debt of the Philippines accumulate rapidly. The foreign component rose from US \$ 2.3 billion in 1965 to US \$ 24.1 billion in 1983. In the early 1980s, recession and higher interest rates worldwide caught the Philippines with ballooning debt crises. From 1986, President Aquino chose to honor all of the country's debt so that the money paid to the debt service rose from 24.5% in 1986 to 44% in 1989. Ramos, followed the Aquino's strategies for the debt, including the structural adjustment policies in his prosperous 'Philippines 2000' plan (WRRC, 1995:1-8).

Structural adjustment policies are policies that the World Bank and International Monetary Fund prescribe to a government in debt to access loans. The Marcos, Aquino, and Ramos governments took the general prescription as their core policies, which included export promotion, the reduction of government spending, privatization, wage control, removal of subsidies, etc. Therefore, the poor were further impoverished by the lack of government spending for such key programs as

agriculture, agrarian reform and education, and for such basic necessities as sanitation, health care, housing, and family planning services. Workers' wages were kept low so that their real wages continue to plummet. Many people, especially women, were therefore being pushed into prostitution, overseas employment and other high-risk occupations. The government's policies encourage women to work abroad and Filipinas have become part of the country's coping mechanism for the debt crisis (WRRC, 1995: 8-38).

Low government spending, high taxes, and low income are among the financial reasons shaping Filipinas' decisions to seek work abroad. These structural forces push them out of the Philippines and this was reflected in the accounts of my interviewees. Among those affected by the minimal government budget of the Philippines are government employees like teachers, clerks, and health workers. One third of my interviewees were in these occupations before migrating. Three of my interviewees had already worked as domestic workers in other countries. The rest of them were students, housekeepers and businesswomen who also faced the financial pressures in the Philippines. They firmly expressed the view that if they could find a good job with good pay in the Philippines, they would not like to work abroad.

Lucy worked as a volunteer nurse in her hometown, and then she sought a job in Manila. She explained the situation in the Philippines, *'It is very difficult to find a job in Manila if you have no backer, someone who can help you, for example in the government'* (Interview, 20/07/97). When she was a volunteer nurse, she did not think that she would go abroad to work; however, after she worked with very low pay in Manila, she recognized that she had to.

Alongside the structural constraints, single women also have strong motivation to earn money abroad for themselves and their families. Working abroad and earning money somehow means a way of leading to their independence. Linda, aged 27, gave up her studies in the university to work abroad, saying that she thought working abroad would be a new and very interesting experience for her. Lucy, aged 29, came to Taiwan when she was 27 years old. She said, *"I earn money for myself, for my future. If I marry, I would have something for myself. If I am not married, my nephews would not take care of me because of no money"* (Interview, 20/07/97).

Married women that I interviewed usually had had their own businesses or small family businesses with their husbands before they worked abroad. Most of them work abroad in order to expand their businesses, contribute to family expenses or pay the education fee for their children. Rosemarie owned a beauty salon; however, the business went down after a volcano erupted at her hometown. She went to Taiwan to earn money for the education fees of her daughter while her husband has worked in Saudi Arabia for nine years. Sally earned money to support her family after her three years work in Saudi Arabia. Grace did not want to work abroad, but her husband and cousins were cheated by a fake broker so that she had no choice but to earn back the money they lost by working in Taiwan. Nancy, who ran a business with her husband, needed more money as capital so she went to Taiwan. Regina was a respected businesswoman in the Philippines. After her business went bankrupt, she worked in Taiwan in order to

return the money to those who made loans to her, and also to distance herself from the Philippines.

Many interviewees chose to come to Taiwan because salaries were higher than those in the Saudi Arabia, Singapore, and Hong Kong. However, in order to earn higher salaries in Taiwan, they had to pay higher fees to the broker. Besides, social networking also influenced their decisions. Lily and Leona went to Taiwan because some of their friends already worked there. Rosemarie learned from her husband's experiences that Saudi had very restricted laws for foreign workers, and he was not allowed to talk to other Filipinos. She chose to work in Taiwan because Taiwan was comparably freer than Saudi Arabia. High salary attracted Nancy, who had worked in Hong Kong and then went to Taiwan, but she did not like Chinese customs so that she was seeking jobs in Canada.

The broker's fee was high. Usually, the Filipina workers I interviewed can only earn 2,000 to 3000 Ps<sup>20</sup> (US \$ 70 - \$ 105) per month in the Philippines. The broker's fee they paid ranged from 45,000 to 100,000 Ps (US \$ 1573 - \$ 3496). Leona was the only exception. She only paid 15,000 Ps (US \$ 524) because of direct hiring (without a broker). One third of them paid 100,000 Ps in all including fees for visa, work permit, and health examination, etc. to work in Taiwan. They borrowed the money from relatives, friends, banks or even brokers. This debt was the most significant burden that forced them to accept all kinds of unreasonable working conditions because it was impossible to earn the needed level of income in the Philippines. When they confronted abuses in Taiwan, they were likely to decide to suffer because of the size of their debts. The debt and the contract made it difficult to return the Philippines without earning money from Taiwan.

Sally worked for ten people in a five-story building. She suffered from mental and physical abuses but she did not try to go home or fight for her rights because she was in debt and badly needed earn money in the Philippines. When asked about whether she would need help from Migrant Workers' Concern Desk, she said, '*No. I may also agree to extend the contract if my employer likes to*' (Field notes, 20/07/97).

Lorna also had heavy workloads and she decided to stay because of the debt:

(Do you know that you are working for ten people before you came here?) No. Before I came here, they [brokers] did not tell me there were so many people. When I first arrived, everybody was at the living room, sitting there. The first time, I just cried, 'My God, I will go home.' But, my debt...I was thinking about my debt. A big amount. That's why I stayed. And then, homesickness came, and many [many] things [came]...It's hard. It took me about six months to adjust to. (Interview, 27/07/97).

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<sup>20</sup>PS \$ 1 = NT \$ 1 in September 1997. However, the bank sells at the exchange rate: PS \$ 0.9 = NT \$1. The minor variation means a great deal for Filipina workers. If her salary is NT \$15,360, the different rate may cause them to lose the equivalent of half a month's salary in the Philippines.

Lorna's case was typical among my interviewees. Most of the migrant women dreamed of earning money abroad and then having a bright future in the Philippines. High salaries in Taiwan, compared with what they could earn in the Philippines and other countries, hid the fact that they came to undertake very tough and risky jobs as domestic workers and that as foreign workers they are going to be treated as second-class human beings. In addition to these disadvantages, those brokers who took money from the domestic workers would not provide them with good service, the real working conditions are unknown at the time the arrangements are agreed, and the relationships with employers are still in question. The Filipina domestic workers are gambling with their fortune: 'May God bless me to meet a good employer!' I do not regard the Filipina domestic worker as wholly a victim of this system as she might happen to meet a very kind employer and sometimes the money they earn in Taiwan does fulfill their dreams in the Philippines. But, the structural constraints exist still and their life chances depend very much on the generosity of their employers and they have limited resources for self-determination. In the next section, I will explore how the recruitment process involves further mechanisms of control by the broker and the employer over Filipina domestic workers.

### ***The gendered and racialized recruitment process***

In the recruitment process, placement agencies play a significant role. First, they benefit a great deal from the migrant workers by the large broker's fee paid. Therefore, they develop and expand the domestic work market to gain more profit. Second, they make matches for their customers<sup>21</sup> and foreign domestic workers. Their opinions are influential especially when it is the first time a household employs a domestic worker. Third, if there are any arguments between their customers and foreign domestic workers, the agencies are expected to deal with them. So, the principles that they are based on are critical to foreign domestic workers' rights. In this section, I will focus on the views of the placement agency and the employer in the recruitment process. I will start by examining the way they commodify foreign domestic workers in order to promote consumption. Then, I will scrutinize the rules, which govern the way they make arrangements. Finally, I will point out that the views from placement companies showing the agencies are on the side of the Taiwanese employers, which further reinforce the isolated position of foreign domestic workers in Taiwan. The sources in this section are based on publications and advertisements of placement agencies, and interviews with the brokers and my field notes based upon conversations with the placement agencies.

There were around 200 placement agencies in Taiwan in 1997.<sup>22</sup> In contrast to placement agencies in Canada, where they are usually family-owned or single-employee businesses<sup>23</sup>, in Taiwan, there are both large companies and small single-employee businesses engaged in this business. The large companies usually have

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<sup>21</sup> Basically, although both the employer and the domestic worker pay the placement agency, it is obvious that in the eyes of Taiwanese brokers, Taiwanese employers are their customers and foreign domestic workers are not.

<sup>22</sup> Interviews with broker A, 07/07/97, and organizers of Hope Workers' Center on 01/08/97.

<sup>23</sup> Bakan, A. B., and Stasiulis, D., 'Making the Match: Domestic Placement agencies and the Racialization of Women's Household Work', p 304.

strong but informal relationships with government officials while small companies are those which have good networks either with customers or with governmental officials. The advertisements of small placement agencies are quite brief, usually telling their customers how to prepare relevant documents for the application process, and the fee to pay. However, large companies have a great deal of capital to develop all kinds of services. One of the largest placement agencies in Taipei makes video catalogues for customers to choose domestic workers, publishes a magazine 'Filipina Maid', organizes an 'Employer Association', and provides courses for Filipina domestic workers to learn how to cook Chinese dishes.

Until now, most of the domestic workers in Taiwan have been Filipinos because they can speak English. However, some companies recently have expanded their range of choice to Indonesia, so there are also advertisements for Indonesian domestic workers. By contrasting different images of Filipina and Indonesian workers, I will analyze how the brokers represent the characteristics of Filipina workers to attract their customers.

In contrast to the images of Indonesian workers who are depicted as obedient, quiet and clever, diligent, taking only two days off a month (which shows that they are willing to be obey the demands of the employers), Filipina domestic workers are represented as easy to communicate with (because they speak English while Indonesia workers do not), active and outspoken. In these advertisements, Indonesian domestic workers are characterized as innocent and faithful because they will not gather together and therefore may be persuaded by other Indonesian workers to run away or to rebel. These advantages reflect most of the dissatisfactions of employers with Filipina domestic workers. Employers' expectations are high, however, but the Filipina workers have far more individuality and autonomy than the employers expect. Advertisements for Indonesian maids reveal the desire of the employers for loyalty and obedience rather than independence in workers. But, there is no ranking between Filipina and Indonesian workers at present in Taiwan as in other countries since the latter cannot speak English. This is the most significant disadvantage of Indonesian workers because there is no way of communicating with them within the household.

In her article 'The Social Construction of Gendered Migration from the Philippines', Tyne suggested that "employers often request potential employees based not on skill, but rather personal characteristics (e.g. young, attractive and happy)" (1994: 603). At certain levels, this argument can be applied to cases of Taiwan: the most popular terms that appear in advertisements are honest, cheerful, diligent and hard-working. However, in addition to these personalities, Taiwanese employers also ask for skills that are much more than one should expect from an ordinary maid. They have fantasies of a cheap but all-mighty maid. A broker told me that Taiwanese employers want maids who are obedient, who need no holidays, who can work twenty four hours and who are capable of doing everything (Interview with broker A, 07/07/97). Employers chose a maid to fulfil their needs by referring to her education, working experiences, family backgrounds, and pictures, etc. The following are the criteria from the employers I interviewed:

"We needed a maid who has experience of bringing up children. So, we wanted a mother, aged from 30 to 40" (Interview with Mr. Ho, 10/07/97).

“I chose those who were well educated. I had employed Taiwanese maids to do the housework...[but] I did not trust them to take care of my children....Their standards are not very high. [If] the Filipina maid I employ can work together with me to educate the children, it would be very helpful” (Interview with Mrs. Chang, 16/07/97).

“I looked at her picture at first, she was selling vegetables in the rural area, I thought she should be that kind of person who is hard working and untiring. I did not expect her to teach English, so I did not ask her level of education.” (Interview with Mrs. Wang, 22/07/97).

A high level of education, a good mother, being diligent or, usually heard, being speak English-speaking; these are the skills in demand when a Taiwanese employer chooses a foreign domestic worker. Although the broker would try to make matches according to these criteria, frequently foreign domestic workers are treated as a commodity. A broker said that although these criteria of their customers are important in the recruitment process, it is difficult to consider individual needs. The matches depend much more on the timing of the documentation process rather than employers' preferred criteria.

Even though placement agencies may not guarantee the choices of their customers, employers still have high expectations of a foreign domestic worker. Taiwanese employers very often take it for granted that a maid should do everything in the household rather than assigned reasonable work. It is common that although they employ a caretaker through the legal process, employers can ask her to do all the housework and childcare which are outside the job descriptions of a caretaker. On the other hand, the Filipina workers are not well informed about the family they work for. At first, they expect to work in Taiwan according to the terms and conditions given in the contract of employment, but it is not the case. The first Filipina domestic worker to return to the Philippines did so because her actual work was outside contract job description (United Daily News, 31/12/92). An interviewee also mentioned the experiences of her friends to me, “*sometimes some agencies told us that your child in Taiwan is like this, like that. But, when they come in Taiwan, [there are] many, many [children]*” (Interview with Rosemarie, 25/07/97).

The placement agencies always take the side of their customers, the employers in order to enhance their business. They try their best to persuade their customers that they can provide the best service from a foreign domestic worker for the least money. For example, they may say that it is not necessary for the workers to have a day off every week or that if a spare room is not available for the maid, she may sleep in the living room (Field notes on 16/07/97). This type of advice is quite disadvantageous for the rights of foreign domestic workers.

The gap between the expectations of foreign domestic workers and those of their employers causes problems in their relationships and when problems arise, the advice from the placement agency play an important role in mediating between them. When there is any trouble between the employer and the Filipina domestic worker, the placement agency will send one of their employees to solve the problems. This is an important service that placement agencies provide; some large companies have

consultant departments, specializing in communications between workers and their employers. Ideally, communication with both parties is to negotiate in the best interests of both sides; however, unequal power relations in the recruiting process exist. The advice and suggestions from the agencies are pro-employer. Although brokers would ask the employer to give some respect to the worker, to allow her a period of time to adapt to the new environment, to praise her when she corrects her mistakes, to take care of her when she feels lonely, they also suggest that the employer should not spoil her.<sup>24</sup> When the brokers meet employers who have very strict working standards for the maids, they can only suggest that the maid admits she is wrong even though it is not true; otherwise the maid will be fired and sent back to the Philippines. One broker summed up their principle honestly, *'it does not matter whether she is right or wrong. As long as she comes to Taiwan to work, she is a second-class citizen in Taiwan even though she spent lots of money to come here'* (Interview with broker A, 07/07/97).

In this chapter, I introduced the backgrounds of Filipina domestic workers in this research. Compared to all the domestic helpers in Taiwan, they were younger and with slightly higher percentage in higher education. They migrated from the Philippines due to the structural forces caused by the government of the Philippines and then put onto Filipinas. They worked in Taiwan, enduring the unhappiness and suffering for their bright future for themselves and their families in the Philippines. The heavy debt tied them to the unreasonable expectations of the employers and unfair treatment from brokers. The brokers regarded foreign domestic workers as second-class human beings and the employers regarded them as all-mighty maids who could shoulder all kinds of heavy workloads. In next chapter, I will examine the working conditions of Filipina domestic workers and compare it with those of Taiwanese domestic workers to see how the working conditions are shaped by their disadvantages in ethnicity, gender and class.



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<sup>24</sup> *A Discipline Book for Filipino Maids*, 1997: 89-91, Taiepi: SAHUCMC.

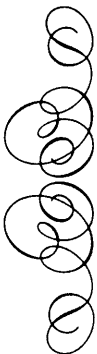


**\*\*Words for Filipina domestic workers: about brokers and employers**


**Brokers** seem to be the only person that you know in Taiwan when you first come to work. I met some nice brokers who were young employers of the recruitment agency and tended to be very caring for domestic workers. They would try their best to help workers if they could. I also some met some tricky brokers who only think about earning money and did little for Filipina workers. It is nice to establish good relationships with brokers. But, it is also not wise to expect brokers to solve all the labor disputes for you since they have their own business interests or constraints as employees of recruitment agencies. They would like to maintain a stable relationship between you and your employers and ask both parties to be tolerant with the situation, usually with preference to employers' interests.

As my research suggests, Taiwanese **employers** might have very high expectations of domestic workers. It is, then important to show them constantly that you should have reasonable workloads and working hours. Try to negotiate skillfully rather than endure heavy workloads silently. If you do not speak for yourself, it is not possible for the employer to decrease their expectations on you automatically.

**YOUR SONG FOR ME**



When I'm dead, my children,  
Don't sing sad song for me,  
Don't plant roses at my head  
or a shady cypress tree.  
Be the green grass above me,  
with showers and dew drops wet,  
And if wilt remember,  
and if wilt forget.



I shall not see the shadow,  
I shall not feel the rain,  
I shall not hear the melody,  
Sing on as if pain.  
Times have changed,  
But memories remain.  
Remember your song,  
Your song for me.  
Remember your mother,  
Who loves you dearly.

*Luz Taaca, Taipei, Taiwan*

## Chapter Three

# The Competing Relationships of Filipina and Taiwanese Domestic Workers

In this chapter, I will present the working conditions of Filipina domestic workers in order to discuss their unprivileged working situations as ‘Filipina maids’ in Taiwanese society. Moreover, I will compare their working conditions with those of Taiwanese domestic workers to show how class and ethnicity effect these two groups of women differently. Since Filipina domestic workers reduce the working opportunities of Taiwanese domestic workers, there exists obvious tension between them. I will also show that how the competing relationships between them are shaped by the forces of gender, class and ethnicity.

### *Working conditions of Filipina domestic workers*

#### 1. Work contents

Filipina domestic workers are responsible for housework and child/elderly care. Housework includes washing, cleaning, laundry and cooking. They have to clean the kitchen, bathroom, bedrooms, sweep and mop or scrub the floor, washing clothes, dishes, and children as well as cooking three meals for the whole household. Most of the Filipina domestic workers felt that it was difficult to cook Chinese dishes at first, but they also had to adjust to it and cooked for the whole family. Childcare varies between tasks like bathing a five-year-old child or extensive responsibilities such as taking care of a baby for 24 hours a day. A domestic caretaker has to take care of the patient, and she is responsible for the cleanliness, diet, activity and all the other needs of the patient. Although her main duty is to look after the patient, she has to perform the housework as well. In Taiwan, most of the domestic workers are not responsible for shopping because language difficulties make it difficult to discuss prices with vendors.

#### 2. Work schedules

Working hours differ from household to household. However, all of the domestic workers interviewed worked more than eight hours. Housework is never-ending and the maids are told to clean and keep the house tidy all the time. In the worst situation, the interviewee worked from 5:30 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. with only one hour's rest. The usual schedule for a domestic helper is preparing breakfast, sending children to school, cleaning, laundry, preparing the lunch, washing up after lunch, rest in the afternoon for a while, playing around with children, preparing the dinner and then, washing up after dinner, the end of the daily work. The schedule of a domestic caretaker is not very different from that of a domestic helper. The main difference is that they have to take the patient as the first consideration. Their long working hours also means that they rarely have free time of their own. In addition to the normal working schedule, they may also need to prepare a night snack for employers or to serve guests. Moreover,

on some occasions, such as the reunions of the family at certain Chinese festivals, the domestic worker also have to serve and cook for all the relatives and guests.

### **3. Welfare: days off, sickness leave, and holidays**

According to the contract, the domestic worker should have a day off every week, usually on Sunday. They should also get allowance if they work on Sunday. One day off is the most controversial issues between the employer and the domestic worker. Seven of the twelve Filipina domestic workers that I interviewed have Sunday off every week. However, this percentage cannot represent all the situation of Filipina domestic workers because I conducted most of the interviews on Sundays. Some of them could choose to have a day off or not but those who did not have a day off every week said it was not possible to negotiate with their employers. Most of them expressed the view that it was important for them to meet friends on Sundays. The day off means not only a rest from a heavy workload but also a chance to contact other Filipinos or attend the church, which is a very important mental support.

However, the importance of Sunday off is not recognized by all the employers. Although one employer interviewed felt that when the maid had a day off, he and his family could enjoy their own family time being together, or some employers respected the importance of Sunday off to the maid, most of the employers disliked the domestic worker's Sunday off. The main reason was fear of the workers becoming more aware of their rights. They said the maid will 'become bad' or 'less obedient' because the workers might compare the working situation with each other and then came to ask for more salary or other benefits. The other reason was that they had to conduct all the housework or child/elderly care by themselves on Sunday.

Some families showed their kindness to the maid by taking her to a high-class restaurant or going on holidays together with her. However, the workers still get to work even on the so call 'holiday' or 'special meal' with the maid. Lily said that her employers would take her to the restaurant when they came back from a holiday. After the dinner, children jumped up and down stairs in the restaurant, and she would still be responsible for taking care of them. A dinner for her did not mean that she was off work at the dinner.

Although the employer would go to see a doctor with the maid, they may not feel like to give her sick leave. Lorna complained that it was useless to see a doctor since she can not get any rest. In order to cope with the endless work, workers tend to endure all kinds of sickness and hope they can overcome the sickness. Health insurance provides little help for the worker. Although there is a health check for all foreign workers every six months, it is not for the health of the worker; rather it is designed to protect the 'health environment' of Taiwanese society.

### **4. Sexual harassment**

Although domestic workers are easily exposed to sexual harassment, the interviewees in my research seldom said that they were being sexually harassed by their male

employers. This might be because I was not very familiar with the Filipina domestic workers. Most of the Filipina workers said that they had close relationships with the female employer and they usually kept distance from the male employer since he was usually not at home or very silent. In some ambiguous situations, the worker would explain her experiences in another way rather than harassment. A worker who only had a male employer said that sometimes the employer would pet her shoulder or bottom, but she would explain it as a joke or she thought that he was missing his mother or sister. Another worker, whose male employer usually wore underpants in the house, felt that it was unusual and she was not respected.

## 5. Salary and salary deduction

The salary of a domestic worker is the same as the basic wage of native workers. However, it is too low to live in Taiwan just by that wage. In 1997, the salary was NT 15,360 (US \$ 537) per month for a foreign domestic worker<sup>25</sup>. Among my interviewees, the highest salary was NT 18,000 (US \$ 629) per month. But, a live-in Taiwanese domestic worker was usually paid NT 30,000 to NT 35,000 (US \$ 1,048 - \$ 1,223) per month, and a day-work Taiwanese domestic worker was paid NT 20,000 to NT 25,000 (US \$ 699 - \$ 874) per month.

Most of the workers paid half the broker's fee before they came to Taiwan and paid for the rest by salary deduction in Taiwan. Therefore, half of the salary in the first six months was paid to the placement agencies. Moreover, they also had to pay tax<sup>26</sup> and health insurance in Taiwan. Thus, domestic workers actually kept a very limited part of salary in the first year. Some employers followed the suggestion of the placement agencies to deduct a savings deposit from their salaries. The employer used it as a means to prevent the worker from 'escaping'. Since the savings account was in the name of the employer, the worker may not get back the deposits although this had not happen to my interviewees.

## 6. Supervision

When a domestic worker first arrived in the household, her employer would direct all of her tasks. The Filipina domestic worker had many things to adjust to cooking, cleaning, and usage of all kinds of equipment. In this period, some employers spent lots of time teaching and directing the worker and it was a very tough period for the worker because the employer supervised everything. After that, they started to work on their own and were only supervised by their working result, rather than the process. In a household with dual career employers, the domestic worker would have less supervision. However, if there were elderly people at home, the domestic worker was more likely to be supervised by them and are controlled in the working process. A domestic worker's work would be supervised by every adult in the household, but the criteria differed from person to person. There were also employers who had no clear

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<sup>25</sup> The salary only raises NT 480 in these two years. The salary in 1999 is NT 15840, equal to US \$ 477 at the exchange rate of 1: 33.2 in Feb. '99.

<sup>26</sup> If a foreign domestic worker lives in Taiwan less than 183 days for the first year, she has to pay 20% of her salary, i.e. NT 3072 for the tax. However, if she stays longer than 183 days for the first year, her salary would be less than the lowest income standard so that she does not have to pay the tax.

idea of what their tasks should be; then they wished the maid to do whatever they felt necessary to do.

## **7. Food and accommodation**

The employer should provide with food and accommodation for the domestic worker. All the Filipina domestic workers that I interviewed had their own accommodation, but sometimes the room was shared with their charge. Although the employer provided them with food, many Filipina workers said that it took a long time for them to adjust to the Chinese food. Many of them had experiences of starving before they adjusted to the food. Some employers felt that it was the maid's problem if she could not adjust to the food, therefore, they did not provide anything for her more than what the employer ate. Although some kind employers would say that they could cook whatever they wanted, but class hierarchy at home stopped domestic workers doing so. One domestic worker was not provided with food; she got NT 500 (US \$17.5) every month for food allowance while the basic standard for eating out was about NT 3000 (US \$ 105) for an adult in a month.

The eating arrangement of the domestic worker is another domain, which shows the unequal power: the employer can decide the eating arrangements of the maid. When the household was small, it was usual that the domestic worker ate together with the employer, especially in the case of caretakers. When it was a large household, the worker seldom ate together with the employer's family. Sometimes, the employer and maids ate together for lunch or in informal occasions that few family members were around. Some employers might ask the maid to eat with them in a big household, but many workers never did so. From the views of the maid, it was not always necessary to eat together. Sometimes they felt freer if they did not have to eat with their employers, but sometimes they felt degraded if they were asked to eat after the employers and to clean up the dishes. It depends on the contexts. No matter how the eating was arranged, the worker was supposed not to eat very much and to clean up all the dishes. All these arrangements depended on the whim of the employers.

### ***Taiwanese domestic workers***

Taiwanese domestic workers are usually elderly women and have worked as domestics for a long period. By the time the government legalized foreign domestic workers, the majority of Taiwanese domestics were aged 40 and above. They are usually women with low education who badly need the money to support their families or themselves.

The three Taiwanese domestics I interviewed were aged 55, 52 and 44. They had worked as domestics for 40, 15 and 12 years respectively. Guoma started her life as a domestic when she was 15 years old. Being a girl growing up in a large family, she migrated from a rural area to Taipei City to earn her living as a domestic. Both Ahwa and Mrs. Liu started to work as domestics after they married and faced economic difficulties due to the birth of the children and the limited income that their husbands earned.

In their forties or fifties, they still looked for jobs as domestic workers not only because they needed the money to support themselves or their family but also because they were used to being economically independent. The situation of these Taiwanese domestic workers reflects the vulnerable situation of poor and elderly women: they live independently with limited economic resources and worked in the informal sectors, which means that they can't get any protection from the legal system.

### ***Working conditions of Taiwanese domestic workers***

Taiwanese domestic workers both do live-in and live-out domestic work. However, those who employed a live-in Taiwanese domestic were usually very rich families. They paid NT 30,000 to NT 35,000 (US \$ 1048-1224) per month for a live-in domestic who could be responsible for both housework and child care. Day work is a more usual form of employment. They work half a day for the salary of NT 15,000 to NT 20,000 (US \$ 524-699) or work twelve hours for the salary of NT 20,000 to NT 25,000 (US \$ 699-874) per month. The contents of work could be just housework or childcare or both. Both work contents and salary are negotiated between the employer and the domestic.

Usually, Taiwanese domestic workers worked without formal supervision. After an initial orientation, they started working right away without any training period. Since they were experienced domestic workers, the employer seldom cared about how they worked; they were usually supervised by working results. Supervision reveals the power that the employer had over their employees. Moreover, in the occupation of domestic work, supervision was to some extent degrading. To be asked about whether they were supervised by their employers, Guoma strongly expressed her opinion, *'if she has to do so, then I won't do this job'* (Interview, 07/08/97).

Both Guoma and Mrs. Liu had worked as live-in domestic workers for many employers. The workload was heavy because the employers were usually rich and had big houses, gardens, cars, dogs, etc. to clean and wash. In her latest employment, Guoma worked from six in the morning until ten in the evening, sometimes until twelve at midnight when she first worked there. The working pattern of a live-in domestic implies that she is likely to lose her freedom of going out in the working days. This situation applied to both Guoma and Ahwa. On the other hand, their rich employers provided them with spacious accommodation and food, which they ate together. Of all their employers, there was only one employer who did not ask Ahwa to eat with members of the household. The emotional support was strong. Their employers usually treated them well in contrast to their heavy workloads and low salary. However, the emotional support was why they liked to continue working there. They felt that they were respected and regarded fondly as a domestic worker by the employer and other family members.

When Guoma was asked why she did not negotiate for higher wage since she worked so hard, she said, *'if you don't accept it, other people are waiting there for this job.'*

They provided me with food and accommodation. That's enough for me' (Interview, 07/08/97). Guoma had limited negotiation power because she worried the difficulties of finding another job and she had no where to stay if she lost the job. However, she quit her job when her health had a downturn because she could no longer live in mountain areas, where many rich people live.

Mrs. Liu worked as a live-out domestic worker for the same employer for ten years. She worked for twelve hours for her employer and went home to take care of her children in the evening. She felt the workloads were increasing; she was asked by the employer to wash an aquarium and ceiling lamp array, which were not part of her working duties. She quit the job two years ago not only because of her poor health but also because of the worsening relationship with the employer.

### ***Comparison of domestic workers of different ethnicity***

To sum up, the Filipina domestic workers that I interviewed were provided with food, had their own accommodation, worked at least ten hours, were responsible for housework and child/elderly care, were supervised by every adult in the household although with various degrees of supervision, and had a salary at basic wage standard. In the case of live-in Taiwanese domestic workers, they were also provided with food and accommodation, long working hours, heavy workloads, and earned low salaries. Both of them were provided with accommodation although sometimes they slept in the same room as with children. Although both of them lost freedom when worked as live-in domestics, the same culture and language make it easier for Taiwanese workers to endure the isolation in the household. Different cultural backgrounds made food, cooking, eating arrangements and Sunday off become an arena, where Filipina workers and their employers competed for power.

Both Filipina and Taiwanese domestic workers are exposed to sexual harassment because of the private nature of this occupation. However, this is less heard of among Taiwanese workers. This may be due to that fact that Taiwanese domestic workers' working conditions are unraveled at current stage, or maybe because Taiwanese workers are not so helpless - compared with Filipina workers - in this situation. They are free laborers who can quit the job if necessary.

In the case of live-in domestics, both Filipina and Taiwanese workers work for long hours. Once working as a live-in, they are on demand 24 hours. If they can rest at night without disturbance from their employers, this is regarded as a kindness. However, the supervision of domestic workers differs. Taiwanese workers tend to be supervised by their working results while the situation of Filipina workers vary depending on the family structure. In dual career families, Filipina workers are less supervised in the working process because their employers are busy. In a household with elderly members who do not work, the Filipina maid is very likely to be supervised, sometimes according to strict criteria.

Both Filipina and Taiwanese workers are low paid in Taiwan although Taiwanese workers seem to earn higher salaries than Filipinas. Filipinas are only paid by minimum wage. For Taiwanese, minimum wage has limited effect to protect workers from exploitation<sup>27</sup> because it is well below the average living standards. The salaries of Taiwanese workers are higher than minimum wage but are just enough for workers to survive in Taiwan. Since the living expenditure in Taiwan is much higher than that in the Philippines, in fact, both Filipina and Taiwanese workers are low-paid. After the legalization of foreign domestic worker, the domestic labor market leaves few working opportunities for Taiwanese workers, which makes their incomes unstable. Their higher salaries decrease their competitiveness in the labor market and they therefore become unemployed. The phenomenon of high unemployment<sup>28</sup> of Taiwanese domestic workers demonstrates that what the government claimed that Filipina domestic workers have a supplementary rather than replacing effect on Taiwanese workers is wrong.

The comparison between Taiwanese and Filipina domestic workers has illustrated that it is difficult to conclude in a word which group of women is better off. Taiwanese domestic workers can negotiate their working conditions and salary with the employer, while the secondary legal status of Filipina workers disables their negotiating ability. Taiwanese domestic workers can quit the job if they are not satisfied with the working situation. In this sense, they are free laborers who can control their own labor. By contrast, Filipina domestic workers have no freedom and come to be controlled by their employers due to their secondary legal position in Taiwan. They become cheap and obedient workers and employers benefit from that. Nevertheless, it is the 'legal position' that makes domestic work come to be recognized as work in the formal sector. Domestic work is work that should be paid, and work that should be regulated by contract. Although Filipina domestic workers are disadvantaged by contracts that bind them to one employer and thus are vulnerable to abuses, they are legally guaranteed by contracts to be provided with the food, accommodation, living expenses, the minimum wage and health insurance<sup>29</sup> in Taiwan. By contrast, Taiwanese workers have to negotiate these basic conditions on their own. They also have to pay the health insurance by themselves. However, for both Filipina and Taiwanese workers, the most essential working conditions, including the working hours, workloads, day off, and sickness leave, etc. are both negotiated by personal power rather than the laws.

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<sup>27</sup> Businessmen in Taiwan have made minimum wage a very tricky regulation. In the factory the 'minimum wage' (NT 15,360), in reality, includes basic wages at the rate of NT 5,000 per month, extra shift payments at the rate of NT 10 per hour, and all other fringe benefits for employees. They work overtime to gain the minimum wage. (Interview with the organizer of TGWWC, 09/07/97).

<sup>28</sup> I can not deduce a suitable unemployment rate for this group of women since the official statistics do not have such categories. However, when I interviewed the Taiwanese domestic workers in the placement agency, there were around ten unemployed domestic workers waiting for suitable working opportunities there. They came every day. It is said by the head of the agency that they hardly ever found jobs after Filipino domestic workers entered the labor market.

<sup>29</sup> The employers are advised to pay the health insurance for the domestic worker but only 81.9% took out the insurance (CLA, 1997:81).



**Table 2. The comparison of Filipina and Taiwanese domestic worker's working conditions**

	<b>Filipina Domestic Workers</b>	<b>Taiwanese Domestic Workers</b>	<b>Common Disadvantages to Workers</b>
<b>Wages</b>	(live-in) NT 15,360 per month + living expenses	(live-in) NT 30,000-35,000 per month + living expenses (day work) NT 15,000-25,000 per month	low paid
<b>Food &amp; Accommodation</b>	guaranteed	guaranteed in live-in, not provided when day-work	losing freedom when live-in, paid less when day work
<b>Health Insurance</b>	81.9% of employers paid for insurance (CLA, 1997:81)	self-support	not guaranteed any sick leave or medical treatment when sick or injured.
<b>Working conditions</b>	regulated by contract, non-negotiable	not regulated by law, negotiable	working hours, contents, workloads, are not regulated by law
<b>Control of Labor</b>	controlled by employers	free laborer	
<b>Results</b>	cheap & obedient labor	expensive labor but with few working opportunities	

Gender ideology plays a part in formulating this situation. These non-regulated working conditions manifest the 'nature' of domestic labor. Domestic work is gendered work. There is no working hours, no sickness leave, and no day off. It is repetitive, heavy loaded, time consuming, and low-paid (or unpaid). Moreover, it requires physical labor and usually emotional involvement. Be they wives, daughters, native or foreign domestic workers, domestic work is to serve the needs of the man/head of the household and his children twenty four-hours a day and seven days a week. It is still not regarded as real work that needs regulation of working hours, sickness leave, day off and overwork. The government, which is dominated by men, does not feel it is necessary to definite the contents and scope of domestic labor for domestic workers<sup>30</sup>. This also reflects many men's attitudes to "women's" domestic labor.

In the employer-employee relationship, both Filipina and Taiwanese domestic workers are structurally powerless. They have little to say about the wages, working hours, working schedules, day off, and eating and living arrangements, etc. Nevertheless, Filipina and Taiwanese domestic workers have different power relations with their

<sup>30</sup> Right at the beginning of the legalization, the government has provided a standard contract for employers' and brokers' references at the recruiting process. However, until now, the government has not provided a standard contract for employers and foreign domestic workers to regulate terms and conditions between them.

employer according to their different class identifications and social positions in Taiwan.

In the case of Taiwanese domestic workers, they have relatively stronger resources to choose and reject the working conditions from employers by negotiating before accepting the job and quitting when the circumstances permit. As long as they decide to take up the work, they begin to establish reciprocal relations with employers. Although Taiwanese workers tend to recognize class differences and accept their secondary positions in the household, they also expect the employer to treat them with respect, which is shown in working without the mistress's presence. On the other hand, the employer tends to use emotional support in exchange for the loyalty and steadiness of a Taiwanese domestic worker. Taiwanese domestic workers have been engaged in this occupation for a long time and have accepted the class hierarchy between them. But, they usually work with dignity and gain emotional support from the employers.

The interactions between Filipina workers and their employers show another pattern. Filipina domestic workers are bound by the working contracts and their debts so that they do not have as strong a power as Taiwanese domestic workers have. Moreover, many Filipina domestic workers are people with high education or middle class backgrounds<sup>31</sup>, who found it difficult to accept the differences set up by class and ethnicity in the employer-employee relationship. This makes the interaction pattern subtler and more complex, and is thus difficult to judge whether Filipina workers are well treated or ill-treated. For example, people tend to think that if a Filipina worker eats with employers, it means that the employer treats her well. However, I find that when a Filipina domestic worker did not have a good relationship with the employer, to eat separately would be a way of asserting dignity rather than eating with her employer. In some other cases, a Filipina domestic worker might have little work to do and have good relationships with her employer, but she was forbidden to use the telephone and had to eat after the employers did. In the case of Lorna, she was provided with food, ate together with the employer, was free to use the telephone, had her own accommodation, had a day off every Sunday, got her salary every month, and had good relationships with the employers. Nevertheless, she gained all these by working twelve hours a day and taking care of a seven-month baby day and night. She did not have sick leave and dared not complain that she had too much work because she was afraid of the contract being terminated. Further subtle power relations between Filipina domestic workers and their employers will be elaborated fully in the next chapter. Here I want to state that many of the Filipina domestic workers I interviewed found it unendurable to accept the class hierarchy in the household. It seems that Filipina workers are formulating a new class-consciousness and identity in the experiences of working in Taiwan regardless of their different backgrounds in the Philippines.

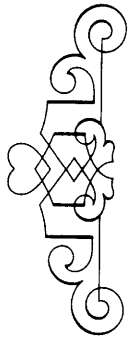
In this chapter, I have presented the working conditions of Filipina and Taiwanese domestic workers. It is difficult to draw a conclusion about which group is better off.

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<sup>31</sup> There are Filipinas who employed maids in the Philippines, coming to Taiwan and working as domestics whereas Taiwanese domestic workers are usually poor and un-educated women.

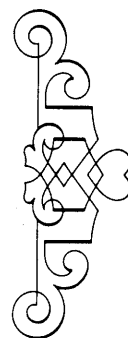
It appears that their working conditions are both poor and it might be a result of the intersection of their class and ethnicity. Moreover, they are both disadvantaged by the gendered construction of domestic labor of those who are in power, usually men. Legal status plays a significant role limiting the resistance and resources that Filipina workers can draw upon while the working opportunities of Taiwanese domestic workers are exploited. The high education or middle class backgrounds of many Filipina domestic workers shape different relations with their employers. Taiwanese workers tend to accept the class differences in the household while Filipina domestic workers tend to reject it. Filipina domestic workers in Taiwan are formulating a new class identity. In next Chapter, I will focus on Filipina domestic workers' relationships with their employers to elaborate how the power relations of gender, ethnicity and class intersect in the interpersonal encounters in the household.

## SECRET



I met God in the morning,  
When my day was at its best.  
And his presence came like sunrise,  
Like glory in my breast.

All day long he stayed with me.  
He gave me strength all the day  
And he gave me perfect calmness,  
And peace during the night.



So I think I know the secret  
Learned from many troubled ways,  
You must seek Him in the morning,  
If you want him through the day!

## LIFE THROUGH A PRISM

The first ingredient in conversation is truth, the next  
good sense; the third, good humor, and the fourth, wit.

*By Luz Taaca*

## Chapter Four

### Power Relations within the Household: The Intersection of Gender, Class and Ethnicity

#### *Are we sisters in struggle?*

In this section, I will discuss how domestic labor transfers from one woman to another woman by looking at why a Filipina domestic worker was employed and how the domestic labor was re-arranged in the household. The following analysis is based on the interviews with members of four households,<sup>32</sup> - the Lees, the Changs, the Wangs, and the Hos -, and their domestic workers.

Both Mrs. Lee and Mrs. Chang were part-time or full-time housewives responsible for managing the domestic labor and childcare before employing a Filipina domestic worker. Their husbands were successful in business and spent little time at home. The gender division of labor followed the rigid man-breadwinner pattern. After they employed a domestic worker, the domestic work gradually becomes the maid's work. However, both Mrs. Lee and Mrs. Chang thought that they were still doing the housework because Mrs. Lee now could make more cookies and Mrs. Chang had more time playing with children and in a good mood. Both of them became the house-managers while all the heavy and routine jobs were done by domestic workers. Mrs. Chang explained her situation, *'Domestic work should be everybody's business. We should not employ someone to do housework...To employ a maid is to share the housework. My friends and I all think that we should do the housework together'* (Interview, 16/07/97, my emphasis). Nevertheless, the reality is that: first, the husband seldom stayed at home so that the domestic work is not *everybody's* business but *woman's* business; and second, the domestic worker takes on heavy and routine work so that they do not *share* housework.

The Wangs, living with parents-in-law and two children aged six and four, spent very little time at home. The mother-in-law was responsible for all the housework and childcare before they employed a maid but when she was sick and stayed with other relatives, the Wangs employed a Filipina domestic worker. The maid did the work of the mother-in-law. However, when the mother-in-law returned to health and came back home, the Wangs found it unnecessary to have a maid and decided not to extend the contract.

Before employing a maid, Mr. and Mrs. Ho shared the housework and arranged a nanny for their children. When the Hos could not find a nanny for the money they like to offer, Mr. Ho's sister persuaded him to hire a foreign domestic worker. The main considerations were: first, they were cheap to hire, and second, they could do housework and take care of children for long hours. Mr. Ho was persuaded by his sister but Mrs. Ho felt that it would be strange to have a 'foreign woman' to live in the

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<sup>32</sup> I interviewed five households for this research. Four out of five households employed a domestic helper, and the other one employed a domestic caretaker. The following analysis is based on the situations of domestic helpers rather than the caretaker since she lived separately with her patient only.

same house. However, at the insistence of Mr. Ho, they employed a Filipina domestic worker.

In the four cases, there exists the 'woman's guilt' of not carrying out domestic work. Mrs. Lee and Mrs. Chang emphasized that the maid is to 'share' the housework rather than replace their role as housewife. This shows their anxiety in employing maids to perform the work that they are supposed to do. Mrs. Wang felt guilty if she did not help mother-in-law do the domestic work and Mrs. Ho also felt guilty about her children if she can not take care of them because of her work. Hidden behind these women's guilt are the social expectations of women carrying out housework and child/elderly care. Domestic labor is women's work, not everybody's in the household. The domestic work is always shifting from women to women: from mother-in-law to wife, and from wife to maid. In this sense, all women share the same structural position to do domestic labor although at different levels.

The following cases show that the existence of Filipina maid does not totally free Taiwanese women from domestic labor. The gendered construction of domestic labor has not yet changed. It is still the wife that to be expected to and carries out domestic and care work when the maid is off or when the maid fails to perform the job well. Lorna's conversation with her employer reveals the first instance.

But only sometimes, on Sunday, my employer said, 'Lorna, Sunday, I am trouble[d].' 'What [why] are you trouble? Mom, you just stay at home.' 'No, the baby is all around me.' It's only easy for me because in the six days I will be trouble like that (Interview, 27/07/97).

Nancy was regarded as making many mistakes in taking care of the baby, such as giving it the medicine at the wrong time. Mrs. Ho was very angry at this situation and worried very much but could rarely do anything to it. Mr. Ho, who insisted on employing a maid, did not want to face the problem. Neither did he want to spend more money on childcare employing a nanny whom they felt trustful, nor did he sacrifice his career to spend more time on his children. He told his wife to tolerant the situation until the child grew up.

Not only the domestic work transferred from women to women, the oppressions on Taiwanese women are also transferred to Filipina domestic workers. Two out of twelve of my interviewees endured very unreasonable working criteria and were maltreated. Three of them were asked by their employers to wash clothes by hands even though they had a washing machine and to scrub the floor rather than mopping. Regina stated her experiences with anger,

(Do you think your employer have reasonable criteria for your performance?) No. Even if you don't do anything wrong, she shouts at me. When we have nothing to do, if I am outside, she wants me to go inside, and if I am inside, she wants me to go outside. I don't know where to place myself. I keep a distance from her. As I told you, what comes in her mind, she wants to do that right away. She saw me, [and] said 'come.' I went near her, [then] she said, 'you go out' (Interview, 20/07/97).

On such occasions, the maid becomes a person over whom a Taiwanese mistress can exercise her limited power. These employers are women more than 70 years old. Many old women in Taiwan were deeply influenced by the idea and fact that 'a daughter-in-law would become a mother-in-law one day.' In the traditional Chinese household, the mother-in-law could exercise her power over the household and could especially treat the daughter-in-law very strictly. The daughter-in-law may endure all the unreasonable treatment in the hope that she will become the mother-in-law some day and then gain the power. In the three cases, it seems that the employers tried to reproduce the unreasonable social hierarchy that was on them onto another woman, the Filipina maid. The abusive treatment of a maid reflects the anxious and uncomfortable feelings of the employer who was a daughter-in-law. The once-powerless woman is now transferring her suffering to another woman and enjoying the rare moment of power in her life. The relationship between the maid and the mistress also reflects powerful/powerless, well-treated/ maltreated experiences of her mistress.

### **When labor for love becomes paid work...**

When asked about what were her unhappy experiences, Lorna answered immediately, '*Working all day. Overtime. Too much work*' (Interview, 27/07/97). Why does a domestic worker have so much work to do? How does this fact reflect the position of the wife at home? And how does the nature of the work change when it is performed by a maid rather than a wife? What is the difference when the work is done by a wife and a maid?

No matter how privileged and wealth she appears, a wife<sup>33</sup> is supposed to perform housework and child/elderly care. Housework has been complained about its "monotony (doing the same thing over and over); fragmentation (doing a series of unconnected tasks); mindlessness (thinking of things other than the task at hand); excessive pace (rushing from one task to the next); and social isolation (being alone in the house too much)" (Oakley, quoted in Glenn, 1986:166). And care work is even more tiresome and restless. However, housework is invisible. When it is done, nobody sees it. It only can be seen when it is not done. A woman's work at home is to make all the dirt unseen and to care for the family members with love, which is bound by social expectations. Taiwanese women not only bear these expectations but also internalize these ideas to perform the work. Their time and energy are divided by all the family members without any awareness. When they fail to perform housework and caring roles at home, they feel guilty.

When a Filipina worker enters the family to do the housewife's work, she partially reflects the life of a housewife. The domestic worker is now responsible for the housework and caring role, which were supposed to be performed by a wife. Working all day and working overtime - the complaint of a Filipina domestic worker - reflects the working situation of a wife. The wife's domestic work is not seen and is not regarded as work until it becomes paid.

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<sup>33</sup>It does not matter whether she does paid work or not. A working woman is also a housewife (See Liu, 1996).

Basically, domestic work is similar when it is done in the Philippines and in Taiwan. Many Filipina workers said that the work was not very different from what they did in the Philippines. As a woman in the Philippines, they were used to domestic labor regardless of their education backgrounds.

(How do you like the job?) I don't like it. But, actually, my job is not that heavy. As if I am in the Philippines in my brother and sister's house, washing clothes for my brother, cleaning house for my sister, taking care of my nephews. It's the same, and it is not really very difficult. (Interview with Lucy, 20/07/97).

(Don't you feel strange to work as a domestic helper since you have a university degree?) No. It's all right. I did housework at home. Housework is all the same. There is no difference working here and working at home. It's all housework. And now, I can even get pay. I don't have pay when I did these work at home. Why not? (Field notes about Judy, 16/07/97).

Nevertheless, the workload of a paid domestic worker is much more than that of a wife. The work criteria rise: cleaning, washing, and laundry have to be done every day. The invisible nature of housework also makes it difficult for a domestic worker. It is easier now for any family member to complain of the visibility of dirt since the work is paid. The payment means that if a domestic worker fails to make the dirt unseen, she is unqualified and should not get the payment. The money secures those who do not carry out domestic work from guilt and they are eligible to give orders now. It is usual that people just leave all undesired dirt to the maid. Therefore, the workloads of a maid become even heavier than that of a wife.

### **When the domestic work is performed by a live-in Filipina maid...**

When domestic work becomes the responsibility of a live-in paid worker, the first thing that they find difficult to adjust to is the lack of autonomy. They do not have freedom: they can not eat what they want to eat, can not go wherever they want to go, and can not talk to friends. If they have some free time, it is due to the employer's 'generosity'.

(If you are unhappy with the working situations, what do you do?) 'Even I am unhappy with it, I have to do it. It is my job. Even though I feel painful [sick or sad], I feel I have to work, that's why sometimes I think about in the Philippines, [if] I am sick, I [am] in bed. While here, if I am sick, I have to work. Where here, you have to work. At home, I am the boss' (Interview with Grace, 22/07/97).

The Filipina domestic workers not only lose their autonomy but are also isolated at home. The housewife may lose contact with the wide society and become isolated because she is confined with children and the housework at home. The isolation of a Filipina domestic worker is worse than that of a housewife due to the nature of her work and language difference.

Few people in Taiwan speak English while Filipina workers speak Tagalog and English. Language difference restricts communication between the domestic worker and people in the household. It makes Filipina domestic workers even more isolated in their workplace, the employer's household. Grace expressed her frustration with her female employer, which was caused by language difficulties:

'Maybe I've done something wrong, what I hope is we can talk face to face together, telling me what she doesn't want. But...she does not have to call the agency. I can understand that she can not express what she wants, but... I can see that's my unhappy experiences, because I am trying very, very hard to be...maybe I have a mistake...but, it's OK. All people make mistakes' (Interview, 22/07/97).

The language barrier sometimes benefits employers. Mrs. Lee regards it as the positive reason for her to employ a Filipina maid. She said,

'It is fine because when I talked to my husband about what happened in the household, she is not able to know. And, when I educate the children, the child won't feel ashamed in front of her [the maid].' (Interview, 25/07/97).

However, the language difficulties sometimes made the Filipina worker very uncertain about her position because she did not know whether she behaved well or not. She knew that she was being discussed but did not know what the employers thought of her.

(I think it's very tough because you have to be sensitive to other people's emotions.) 'Yes, especially when you feel they are angry with you and you don't know the reason, then you [are] mentioned...oh, what did I do?' (Interview with Grace, 22/07/97).

### **If Love/Sex + Labor = Wife, what's the difference between us?**

In addition to the physical labor, a wife performs emotional labor in the family. Emotional labor is regarded as the most special characteristic of a wife. A wife is different from a maid because she does domestic labor with love. If the live-in domestic worker provides emotional labor, what would happen? Can the maid replace the wife? Is there any tension between the wife and the maid?

The Filipina domestic worker provides emotional labor, especially when she is responsible for caring for children or the elderly. The maid usually has strong ties with her charges. Therefore, some 'experts' who are studying the impacts of Filipina maids on children<sup>34</sup> express a fear that a mother's emotional labor will be replaced by a Filipina maid.

Based on similar reasons, any relationships between the male employer and the Filipina domestic worker become the object of very suspicion. When the wife's position was

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<sup>34</sup> See the news reports on United Daily News, 04/04/96 and Central Daily News, 01/07/96.



built on the sex/love relation with the husband, there are always tensions between the wife and the domestic worker. If there were love or sex relations between the maid and the master, the mistress would lose her position as a wife. Any ambivalent emotional and physical crossing must be prevented. Therefore, the brokers always gave advice to the maid to keep away from their male employers:

(Do you get any training before you came here?) Yes, the agencies told us some experiences of working, how to deal with tax, the relationships with employer, etc. They told me to have good relationship with mistress. If she likes you, you can stay long. And not to be close to the master. It's true. (Field notes about Linda, 13/07/97).

Before coming here, we have seminars about dealing with relationships with husbands and wives and the agency told us that most important was when dealing with the wives, not to provoke jealousy in respect to the husband. Many cases abroad, like in Singapore or Middle East, mostly the madam of the domestic helper is jealous with [of] them, because they [the maid] are very close to the men, their boss. So...It's not good to be close to the men, it's better to be close to the wives, so that you can stay longer. That's the advice in the agency. (Did you try to do that?) I am doing. [Laugh] That's really I am doing. A man is a man, if you are close to a man, especially I am a Filipina, you deal with a jealous people, you don't have the same culture like that. (Interview with Nancy, 17/07/97).

The wife uses various strategies to deal with the perceived relationship. Mrs. Lee and Mrs. Chang were housewives and worried less because their husbands had few chances to be in contact with the domestic workers. Mrs. Wang did not worry since her parents-in-law were always around home. She also drew a quite clear class and ethnic line between the maid and the family members. She thought that the Filipina maid was different from the Taiwanese, so the husband would not like to have any relationship with her. In the Ho family, Mrs. Ho worried about the possibility but she could not do anything about it because she spent much of time working outside the home. The domestic worker, who sensed the unusual tension between them, also kept away from the husband. Although Mr. Ho explained that he avoided the ambivalent situation by not communicate with her in person, his behavior said another thing: the maid complained that Mr. Ho always wore brief underwear at home, which made her very uncomfortable. This pattern shows that the maid and mistress relationship is reproducing the competing relationship between two women which was caused by a man. However, the husband was rarely blamed.

***\*\*Tips for Filipina domestic workers: How to face moody accusations from the employer?***

I usually heard about unreasonable accusations that employers have of workers. It is important not to take it too seriously or to regard it as your fault. Working and living in an unfamiliar family is a very tough job, especially when both men and women in the household do not respect domestic workers as workers. Sometimes the accusations are just outlets of family members' dissatisfaction with each other. Sometimes unsolved family problems will spread all over members in this household, and one would criticize the other for failing to supervise the maid well. Bear in mind, it is not your work performance that cause them to argue. You should not feel guilty for that. The language difference also makes it stressful to see family members argue. But, you can also take it as an advantage: not to care about what they are arguing about. If it is directly related to your work, they certainly will come to tell you how to improve in the future.

***Relationships within households: class distinction and class formulation***

To discuss the relationships between maids and mistresses, class issue must be addressed. There are different patterns of interaction between them but there still exist class differences. In this section, I start with different patterns of interaction in the households to present different interaction models. Then, I will look at how the concept of 'one of the family members', working on the other way, reveals the class distinctions between the maids and other family members. Finally, I will elaborate that the class differences are in the process of formulation either on the side of Taiwanese employer or the Filipina maid. The dependency of employer family on Filipina maids makes the formulation lasting.

***Relationships between women: businesslike and emotional control patterns***

Within the four households, Mrs. Ho and Mrs. Wang worked full time and spent a great deal of time on their work, while Mrs. Lee and Mrs. Chang were housewives with strong networks and very rich social lives. According to their different patterns of interaction with their maids, I, borrowing Romero's (1992) concepts, categorize the former as a 'businesslike' relationship and the latter as a pattern of 'emotional control'. The mistresses had different lifestyles and thus had very different attitudes to the maids they employed.

In the businesslike relationship, there is little communication between the employee-employer and the mistress had less time at home to supervise their working process. This relationship maybe good for a live-out domestic worker but it was problematic in the context of the live-in domestic worker in Taiwan. The distrust between the employee-employer and the little communication between them mean the businesslike relationship can be very distanced and raise suspicions. Therefore, when any conflict comes, it is usually perceived by workers as class differences or racial discrimination.

Mrs. Wang maintained a businesslike relationship with her domestic worker, Grace. They did not communicate with each other and Mrs. Wang did not trust Grace. Their relationship was weakly built on the decision of Mrs. Wang to consider Grace's performance only rather than her personality. The family members suspected Grace stole something from the household, but Mrs. Wang decided it was not important and then ignored the complaints. She said,

'I don't know whether she stole something. But, I have to believe that she did not. I tell myself that if I did not find something lost, that thing must be not important for me. Otherwise, I will have to stay at home looking at her all the time' (Interview, 22/07/97).

It is obvious that Mrs. Wang accepted the suspicion of other family members, but she kept it for herself and established a distanced relationship between them. The businesslike relationship is cool with no communication. The employer has strong power to control every aspect of the live-in worker's life. Mrs. Wang felt that the workload of Grace was not heavy so that she gave her only one day off in a month. Therefore, when Grace asked for one more day off, Mrs. Wang was angry and refused her to receive any incoming phone calls. The mistress would exercise her power over the maid to display her authority and reinforce the class differences.

The Hos stayed at home less than 12 hours a day, and they also had a businesslike relationship with Nancy. Nancy had a heavy workload but she was not supervised and had some freedom when the employer worked outside the home. The communication between the worker and the employer was limited. Living under the same roof with limited conversation, Nancy felt that she was different and was not trusted by her employers. The businesslike relationship came along with the discrimination against her; she said '*I am not close to the woman and I am not close to the man, the same. Racial discrimination because I am a maid, that's it.*' (Interview, 17/07/97).

In contrast to the distant and suspicious businesslike relationship, Mrs. Lee and Mrs. Chang had much more emotional involvement with their domestic workers. Both of them were housewives so that they were able to spend more time with their children and their domestic workers. They said that domestic work was their responsibility and they just employed maids to 'share' it. They paid much attention to their maids and maintained a good relationship with them. They took the issue of 'how to manage and have good relationship with the maid' as a task which is as important as to have good relationships with their husband and children. Both of the maids mentioned that they were treated as a member of the family and had very good relationships with their mistresses. None of the domestic workers felt that they were used by the employers. Mrs. Lee and Mrs. Chang showed their affections to their maids because an equal and respectful relationship would not let them feel that they were oppressing another woman.

There was also a household that provided plenty of emotional support to the worker on the one hand, but gave her a very heavy workload on the other hand. Lorna worked in a household for ten people. She had to clean six rooms, three floors, laundry for ten people, and was taking care of a two-year-old child for twenty-four hours.

Lorna's working hard won her employer's heart. *'My employer told me, "Lorna, I worship you." "No, don't say worship. Just say 'appreciate'. Worship is for the God. A holy word. Why?" "Because you are too strong."* Then, Lorna interpreted her feelings, *'They say they like me. Of course they like me...I do everything for them...We eat together. Sometimes I am shy because they serve me the food. That's my medicine. You can not say they are against me. They are good. Even though I am hard in working, it is just OK because I never heard the bad words'* (Interview, 27/07/97).

In this case, the emotional support was a result of Lorna's hard work. Their relationship was based on the reciprocal exchange of labor and affection. These cases reveal that the workload and emotion support are two different things. Even though the employer may be emotionally attached to the domestic worker, the workload may not necessarily change. Therefore, in the live-in employee-employer relationship, it seems that the 'emotional control' pattern benefits the domestic worker more than the 'businesslike relationship' because the live-in style has already implied that the employer could request the maid whenever and whatever they wanted. However, to avoid any ambivalent circumstances, emotional labor should only be supplied by the mistress rather than the master. Women's emotional labor is exploited again by the needs of the whole family even if she employs a Filipina maid.

#### **"We are a family, aren't we?"**

In either patterns of interaction, all the mistresses explained that, 'she is a member of our family'. On the one hand, the maids are told by brokers to call their female employer 'Mom', male employer 'Sir', mother-in-law of the female employer 'Amah (grandmother)' and father-in-law 'Agong (grandfather)'. On the other hand, all the family members, employers or children alike, call her by her name, thus positioning the maid in the lower sector of the hierarchy of the employer family, similar to the position of a child. 'Mom' implies the supposed intimate relation with her female employer while 'Sir' is a distant but respectful one. The children call her by name, which from the view of Taiwanese custom, means transgressing in the kinship hierarchy, but from the view point of western culture, is usual and acceptable. Filipina domestic workers mostly grew up in a westernized environment so that the calling by name does not violate their identity. But, for a Taiwanese child, the calling by name already implies transgression and disrespect.

Is a Filipina maid a member of the family? The naming in the household already suggests that she is a degraded and secondary family member. Filipina maid is usually at similar age with her female employer but the latter does not regard her as 'my sister' rather requires the maid to call her 'Mom'. The paternalistic naming implies the class differences between them. Emotional attachment, even though appearing little in the businesslike relationship, is exercised together with authority to control the Filipina maid. In the case of businesslike relationship, Nancy's contract was about to be terminated but she was not informed until a week ago. She said, *'my Mom says she loves me. She says I am a member of the family. But, they are going to send me home without informing me'* (Field notes about Nancy, 24/08/97). In the situation of emotional control, the relationships are not reciprocal: the 'Mom' has the rights to

know the lives and problems of the maid. However, it is impossible for the maid to ask those of the mistress unless she reveals herself to the maid. The class distinction between the maid and herself is an important index to position on both sides.

Nevertheless, the class distinction was a dynamic process in formulation rather than a fixed expectation of the Taiwanese mistress. Mrs. Lee is a good example. Mrs. Lee did not have a maid until she employed a Filipina maid and then had four consequently. She explained how she learned to adjust to the relationships with a maid. At first, she had very loose expectations of the first maid, and the only clear one was to take care of her youngest daughter when she was busy. Mrs. Lee tried to show her respect to Filipina maids so she used 'Miss Phil' to mention the Filipina workers when she talked to me, while the common usage in Taiwan was 'Filipina maid'. She also took care of her maid, taking an interest in the maid, her background, her family, her friends, etc. She said that she was very nervous about having a maid. Once she was out and thought that her maid was alone at home, then she brought home McDonald's hamburger home just for the maid. Having experienced four different maids, currently she did not treat the maid as her child, who needed to be under her protection. She gave the maid certain jobs, concerned only about the work performance of the maid, and did not intend to understand all the relatives and lives of the maid to show that they were close friends.

Mrs. Wang also changed her attitudes to her maid. She decided not to extend the contract of Grace, her first maid. She felt that she did not have strict criteria for her at first, therefore, Grace did not work particularly hard as a good worker should do. If Mrs. Wang could restart again, she would like to have a clear work schedule and tasks for her maid.

The other family members were not used to having a maid at home, neither. When Grace followed the instructions by the broker to call Mrs. Wang's parents in law 'Amah' and 'Agong' (grandmother and grandfather), they laughed because Grace, who was only six years younger than her female employer, had to degrade her position to the equivalent of a six year old child. They were amused by the new hierarchy at home but they did not try to change the situation. Grace still used 'Amah' and 'Agong' and called the female employer 'Mom' as all the Filipina domestic workers did.

By contrast with Mrs. Lee and Mrs. Wang, Mrs. Chang had employed some Taiwanese maids to do the housework before she employed a Filipina maid. She knew how to assign a task for a maid. Since she felt the Taiwanese nanny was too 'low-class', she decided to employ a Filipina maid with a BA degree in education. The FDW policy made it possible to fulfil such a high criterion for a nanny and the class differences were formulated between two women with same class background through international labor migration.

The class formulation within the Taiwanese household is very likely to continue since they depend very much on the maid. According to the official survey in 1996, 94.49% employers would continually employ foreign domestic workers after their present contracts expired (CLA, 1997:106). My interviews have consistent results. Three out of four households will continue to employ maids. The Wangs were the only

exception saying that they did not want to employ one in the near future. However, this is because the parents-in-law will be responsible for the domestic labor. Mrs. Lee was aware of her and other family members' dependency on Filipina maids, but she could not do anything to alter this situation:

'I do not know whether I will employ one again. Many people are spoilt after employing a Filipina maid. Both the adults and children are spoilt. They feel that they do not have to any [house] work at home and depend on the maid quite a lot. Most of people will continue the employment over and over unless they hired someone who was very bad.' (Interview with Mrs. Lee, 25/07/97).

The class distinction is being formulated not only in Taiwanese households, but also among Filipina domestic workers. I've mentioned in Chapter Three that Filipina domestic workers of high educational backgrounds find it difficult to adjust to the secondary roles that Taiwanese employers assign to them. In next section, I will show how these degrading behaviors based on class differences in connection with the metaphor of 'the other uncivilized ethnicity' work on Filipina domestic workers, and how they resist the unfair treatment. I believe that a new class and ethnic identity as Filipina domestic workers is being formulated in Taiwan.

### ***\*\*Take domestic work as a profession***

It is difficult for many people to adjust to such degrading positions that Filipina domestic workers experienced in the Taiwanese household. Romero's book *Maids in the U.S.A.* (1992) suggests to me that it is important to establish workers' self-identity as professional workers of domestic work. On the basis of this, workers can negotiate for working dignity in the labor process. Although the Chicano maids that Romero studied were day-workers, rather than live-in maids, it is still worthy of making efforts to take domestic work as a profession and thus to win respects of employers.

I would also like to ask Taiwanese employers to assign workers reasonable workloads, within reasonable working hours and proper Sundays off. It is also essential to treat foreign domestic workers as respectful workers. It is such a shame for some Taiwanese being so selfish and ethnocentric to humiliate or mistreat foreign workers such as I describe in this chapter.

### ***Downgraded as a Filipina maid***

A Filipina domestic worker carries out degrading domestic labor in the household, under the unequal power relations as a member of the lower class, and she is also downgraded as a Filipina maid. From the guidance *The Foreign Domestic Helper Habit Guidance* which was provided by the broker for the employer, we can see how the Filipina domestic worker is connected with dirt, which is similar to what I mention in the previous chapter that they are seen as a source of disease. This book has two parts. It starts with sanitary habits. They are told to brush teeth, wash their hands with soap, take a shower every day, and trim fingernails and toenails, etc. It represents a Taiwanese imagination of non-white foreigners that they come from under-developed

areas and are dirty. Therefore, the first thing to learn is to keep them clean. The second part of the guidance is about the living etiquette at home and at public. At home, they are told to obey employer's request, and try to entertain the visitors, etc. In public, they are told to wear neat clothes, not to throw rubbish anywhere, keep out of mischief, not to make noise in public place, obey traffic regulations, etc. These teachings are quite common in children's school textbooks. The efforts to 'educate' Filipina maids with such teachings reveal the fact that the Taiwanese people regard Filipino workers as 'uncivilized' and 'uneducated' foreigners. However, the imagination is far away from the reality, Filipina domestic workers are well-educated workers from a westernized/civilized country.

### **Working without dignity**

Many domestic workers felt that they were looked down upon and degraded when working. Lucy was a registered nurse and went to Taiwan working as a domestic caretaker. She felt very overlooked and frustrated when her professional knowledge was not respected by her employer.

I said, 'why I am here, I am a registered nurse.' It's really degrading. You feel so down. ...After the second heart attack [of the patient], I am really not satisfied with myself because I can not be a nurse here. Because I can not do what I want. He always tells me what to do. 'Please place this back.' I said should say 'No. I am not supposed to do, it's my duty'. ...One morning, I said, 'Sir, mom, mom is not awake.' [She raised the voice and became very speedy on the following stories.] 'Why?' 'I don't know.' Then, my patient was already in coma. And you know what? He went to the clinic. I said, 'Sir, we will go to the hospital, not in the clinic.' ...[After six hours in the clinic], then, the doctor said, you can go to hospital now. So, you see, if he went directly to hospital, we do not have to wait so many hours. I can not tell him because I am not the one to be followed. He is the one because he is the boss and he is the doctor and nurse of his mother. (Interview, 20/07/97).

Lorna had even more degrading experiences as a Filipina domestic helper. She ate with her employers at home, but when they went out to eat, she had to stand there to serve them. Her employer showed her off to his friends by degrading her. In front of his friends, the employer asked her to clean the shit of the dog, which was not her responsibility. Lorna was very embarrassed and her employer and friends then laughed at her.

Regina's story also explained that how she was degraded by her employer,

'She doesn't want to see my clothes hanging, just like this morning, last night, I wash some underwear I hanged it of course. And this morning, I forgot to take it out. I was surprised she got up early because she used to get up late. She got up early and she saw it. Call me, 'Regina...' The daughter downstairs offer me sometime to hang my clothes in her house. It's just easy for everyone to tell me just be patient. But, in the market you know, everybody knows us. You know why? Because people used to see us, she is having a dog with her. Even though

you have a pet, you love it, right? She can't even treat me as a pet dog. Shout don't know how to place myself. When I walked behind her, 'Tzo -la, tzo-la' [Go, Go]. ... everybody knows her and her children know that because the neighbors keep on telling them. They say you are lucky to have your worker, she is very kind.' But, I give up. Maybe it's not the only way of earning money.' (Interview, 20/07/97).

In these cases, Filipina maids were degraded in the metaphor of a dog and dirt (shit and underwear). They were asked to make the dirt unseen, (to clean the shit and to hide her underwear) and their employers gained power from giving these orders. Sometimes, even the guests thought that they had the right to give orders to the Filipina maid. The following example is Lorna's experience,

When the girlfriend of her brother comes, she said, '[clean] twice in the evening and in the morning.' But, I did at first. [It happened] when I first came. So, I was still working at 9.00 in the evening and I had a baby [who] is almost 7 months [to look after]. (Interview, 27/07/97).

The Taiwanese exercised their power over a Filipina by the equation of 'maid' and 'Filipino'. They thought that they gave orders to a maid. However, I suppose, they would not try to give orders to a Taiwanese maid who was only responsible for cleaning the host's house. These degrading orders are given on the assumption that they are Filipina maids and it is unlikely to happen to Taiwanese maids.

### **Struggling to work with dignity**

Although suffering from degrading treatment, Filipina domestic workers are not totally victims. They also try to use limited resources they have to fight back. How did they do? Lucy won back her dignity by her professional knowledge.

After the attack, maybe he trusts me already and he thinks that I can handle his mother. When he said, I will do this. 'No.' I said. 'OK' he said. My ward can't swallow. She can only drink juice. I say, 'OK, just a little' (Interview, 20/07/97).

Lorna used her fluent English to fight. The girlfriend of the brother was teaching children English. But, after the open communication with the whole family, Lorna showed them that her English was much better than that girl. Now, the girlfriend did not give any orders to her.

However, because the Filipina domestic workers owned limited resources, the struggles were under many constraints. If they fight with the employer, they would probably be sacked. Therefore, sometimes they can only leave the words in their own mind.

Before, everything I just did it, because I was afraid of him sending me back. But, in side was very, very nsulting. But, now I already... never mind. f he doesn't like my cooking, I say, 'I did not do cooking for you, but I come here to take care of your mother.' (Did you tell him



that?) No, just a joke, I am afraid. I said it to myself sometimes I said it aloud in my own language. Just keep the pain inside, does not let it out. (Interview with Lucy, 20/07/97).

Sometimes, when Filipina domestic workers felt unhappy, they would use the final tool they have, going home, to against the power exercised over them. Going home shows the power of their free will. Going home also means that the worker is going to fight for their right regardless of the result. Although few workers do go home, the idea has provided them with the strength to prove that they still have some dignity as a Filipina worker in Taiwan.

“Even she [the mistress] said that ‘don’t go there until you finish your work’, but I miss home, I also go [to see a Filipina friend]. It’s payment, anyway, I have already half my payment. The other half, if they want me to go home, it’s OK for me. I can see my family. But, ...luckily, I stay, so my boss has patience with me. So, I can’t say anything to them. They are good, compared with my friends’ ” (Interview with Grace, 22/07/97).

“My father, they gave me financial aid already. I am about going home, but still not yet finish they said, ‘you’d better come home and you will be happier.’ Because my children miss me. *But, if only I found a good employer, I would not thinking of going home.* That time I signed the contract, it was my desire to work for two years. But, I signed only one year, then I can extend it. But, because of those sad experiences, [and] because [if] I will continue working for another year, I can feel that something might happen to me. I maybe go home not in normal mentality also” (Interview with Regina, 20/07/97). [my emphasis].

The home provides a sense of belonging, and the home is where they feel needed. This is in contrast to how they are treated in Taiwan: they feel degraded and unwanted regardless of the reality that the family they worked for depends very much on them. The desire of going home also shows their identity as Filipinas. As Lorna expressed:

I want to find a job but I don’t want to live here. You really want to go back your home. Even if you are in Hong Kong, in Taiwan in Saudi, you want to return to your country. There is no place like home. I want to go home now. I hope it is October already. (Interview with Lorna, 27/07/97).

### **Support and resistance**

However, before the dreams of going home come true, being unprivileged in Taiwan, working degradingly as a foreign maid, Filipina domestic workers suffer from homesickness, stress, depression and loneliness. They usually feel unhappy and usually cry. But, the comforts of meeting other Filipinos, the strength gained from believing in God and attending Sunday mass, the support from family in the Philippines, and sometimes the affection for her charge, bring them strength to continue their work. The support network of Filipinos plays a very important role in their working lives in Taiwan and has been mentioned over and over in the interviews.

Of course people cry. Not only me, also my daughter, also my husband. Sad, very lonely. But, even I feel so lonely, I went to church. I talked to parish, I talked my problem. Of course it's problem right? Yeah, and the father told me, 'oh, you just pray. You ask our Lord.' After [that], I pray. No, no more problems. In the train station, sometimes we talk about the life, after that the funny story. We laugh, laugh, all day long. Sometimes I went to the park to take pictures to send my husband, send my daughter, just like that. (Interview with Rosemarie, 25/07/97).

Oh, no, they [my employers] do not know I cry in the evening. Just like the song, crying in the pillow. Because we miss our homeland in the Philippines. So, every Saturday I am very happy. Tomorrow is Sunday, I am going out and I feel relax. If I meet Filipino, we just like in the Philippines. That's why we like to meet each other (Interview with Lorna, 27/07/97).

(So, how can you cope with the pressures?) I wanted to tell you again, that I thank the God for giving me these people, my friends here. This is my outlet. No more else (Interview with Regina, 20/07/97).

I always cry. I am so sad here. (Whom do you have best relationship with?) The five year old girl....Sometimes I cry alone in my room, she asks me 'why are you crying?' 'Because I am sad. I miss home.' Then, she would ask me not to go to the Philippines. The child brings me some comforts. (Interview with Sally, field notes on 20/07/97).

Friends and churches are especially important resources that support Filipina domestic workers' resistance. NGOs such as the Migrant Workers' Concern Desk and Hope Workers' Center that help migrant workers are religious institutions. They started the work from every Sunday's contacts with Filipino workers and hope these organizations can enhance the rights of foreign workers. However, the support network of Filipina domestic workers that I interviewed sometimes becomes an outlet rather than a mechanism that forges their resistance. Sometimes, it is due to the vulnerable situations of Filipina domestic workers. After knowing Sally was suffering from heavy workload, I suggested her to ask for some help, but she rejected:

(Have you told anybody about your suffering?) I can go out from 15.00 to 16.00 every afternoon and come back at 15.45. I usually go to visit a friend who brings her charge to English school. I only told all my suffering to her. (Have you told the sisters or Fathers? Maybe they can pray for you.) No. (You can also go to the representative of Migrant Worker Concern Desk over there. Will you go?) No. I may also agree to extend the contract if my employer wants (Field notes about Sally, 20/07/97).

The struggles of Filipina domestic workers are still at the individual level. Although they gain support from family, friends, and churches, they still face these daily

struggles in person. No organizational forces have been formed by Filipina domestic workers either because of the private nature of domestic work or the constraints of their legal status. To enhance the collective resistant power, Filipina domestic workers or those who want to help them could draw on the common oppressions of class, ethnicity and gender that they experienced in Taiwan to forge their strength, fighting for their rights.

***\*\*A reminder for workers: establish your social network***

It is important to establish your own social network in Taiwan. I hope that I am not being paternalistic in saying this. I remember that one of my interviewees said that she did not find any Filipina friends for the first ten months. The isolation and loneliness were unbearable. To expand your social network in the cities, you can try to find other Filipina workers at local Catholic Church, community park or when you throw the garbage out at night.

**RATHER THAN JUDGE, ... FORGIVE**



We are all aware what's happening on earth. You can see many people are suffering crisis, hunger, and difficulties in life. Natural calamities, attack and epidemics occur everywhere. Because of this situation, people think to find a solution how to survive. Sometimes it is a reason why robbery, stealing, selling drugs, selling sex, etc. are happening everywhere. And even you go to visit those detention centres near your place, you can see many detained in the jail and you can encounter different kinds of cases.

But most people are judgmental and not willing to help. They depend on what they see and never understand them. I believe that no one is bad all the time. There is a reason behind why they did a wrong doing. The Bible said in Luke 6,37: "Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Forgive, and you will be forgiven." This verse is one that we need to memorize. Because people are quick in judging and feel excused from assisting.

In some instances, we also misjudge people who have fallen into wrong relationship. For example an affair with a lesbian or an affair with a married man. Nobody wants to commit mistakes. No matter how much they avoid temptation, but because they are in love, whatever the situation they found joy and happiness in being together. But how did this happen? And why? Sometimes there are many things on this earth difficult to understand and even science cannot explain it. We don't know the person why they had fallen to it. But who are we to judge? All of us are sinners.

In another case, did you read the story about an affair between the priest and one of our Co-OCW? The priest who is assigned to their parish has become her boyfriend. It was published in T.F. Magazine October 1998 issue, entitled "If you love someone." In other words, nobody is perfect. As human beings we cannot be perfect ourselves. Remember that no one is good and bad all the time. It is the human nature.

The Lord said, judgment is his, and rather than judge another person, we need to pray for them to see the light of God's truth. They always have a right to be understood and the best way and give them a chance to straighten their mistakes. Forgiveness is so important because it affects us in all levels of relationship.

The foundation of judgment is Jesus Christ and he is the one who is responsible for forgiving. In the Letter to the Ephesians verse 4,32 he said: "Be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgives you."

Lastly, I repeat "Don't judge before helping". It is not a suggestion, it is a commandment.

*By Luz Taaca,  
Taipei, Taiwan*



## Conclusion

In this book, I have set out the social positions of Filipina domestic workers and their resistance in Taiwan at both macro and micro levels to answer the question of 'whether Filipina domestic workers are winners or victims of international labor migration.' Different dimensions involved in this issue are examined: Filipina domestic workers' migration process, working conditions, and power relations in the household together with their legal status and the way they are perceived via the views of Taiwanese employers, brokers, and government officials. I also discuss their resistance and strategies for survival in a gendered, racialized role as a Filipina maid in Taiwan.

Previous studies and reports on Filipino workers in Taiwan are unsatisfactory because their subjectivity was rarely given a voice. The images of Filipina domestic workers in the newspapers and in the eyes of most Taiwanese people were related to disease and dirt. The laws confined the working rights of Filipino workers rather than protected their working conditions.

Filipina domestic workers in this research were generally young, educated migrant women who sought work abroad due to the economic crisis in the Philippines. To gain money for their family or themselves, they entered the gendered role as a maid working in Taiwan. To fulfil their dreams, they borrowed a great deal of money to pay the broker's fee and the debt thus limited their choices of terminating the working contract when abused. In Taiwan, they were framed by legislation and perceived by the employers and brokers as secondary human beings and thus had limited working rights.

Their working conditions in Taiwan were far from satisfactory. They endured long working hours, heavy workloads, limited time off, no welfare and sickness leave, and possibly physical and mental abuses to earn wages 30% below that of Taiwanese domestic workers. They also undermined the working chances of Taiwanese domestic workers and were displacing Taiwanese domestic workers in the domestic labor market. The comparison of their working conditions with those of Taiwanese domestic workers showed that the former was double disadvantaged by workers' gender and ethnicity. The discriminatory laws of Taiwan provided little protection for them and their working conditions were poor, sometimes very strict and unreasonable. The language and cultural differences also created difficulties in adjusting to their working environment.

Although we have seen many structural constraints of gender, class and ethnicity operating upon Filipina domestic workers, these differences were in a process of formulation. Filipina domestic workers came from different backgrounds and were now forming their identity as Filipina domestic workers in Taiwan. Taiwanese employers were also adapting to a new family hierarchy in the household. Domestic labor was undesirable labor that was transferred from woman to woman and now became the Filipina maid's work. A wife in the household differentiated her role from a maid by reinforcing the class, gender, and ethnic differences between them. Employing a Filipina maid did not solve all the problems of housework and childcare; it

also involved 'management' of the female employer, and required a lot of efforts. The interviews with employers suggested two patterns: those who established businesslike relations and who built up emotionally supportive relations. Both types still maintained class hierarchy in the household. When working for Taiwanese employers, Filipina maids endured degrading behavior, which associated them with dirt and being uncivilized. They used professional knowledge, English or the idea of going home, as ways of resisting or coping with these degrading working experiences. Family, Filipino friends and the Church gave them comfort and support. However, the limited resources and unprivileged legal status left them without organization to fight for their own rights.

Filipina domestic workers are neither victims nor winners in international labor migration. Structural controlling mechanisms restrict their power. Their positions in Taiwan society are shaped and disadvantaged by their ethnicity and gender. There is only a limited space for them to fulfil their dreams of earning big money in Taiwan.

### **Limitations of this research**

This research deals with a variety of issues relating to Filipina domestic workers in Taiwan. Since there is little literature that could be directly applied to the situation in Taiwan, this paper has a restricted dialogue with existing research. Moreover, this book attempts to address broad issues within a limited space, with special focus on gender and work. Therefore, the subjective narratives of Filipina domestic workers can not be fully represented and the analysis requires further in-depth interrogation. The variation of individual cases tends to be forgotten within the writing process; consequently, I found myself becoming more and more arbitrary in using the data. Finally, the comparison of working conditions of Taiwanese and Filipina domestic workers is based upon limited cases of Taiwanese workers, therefore, the arguments need to be confirmed and supported by further research.

Several issues addressed in this research can be developed further: (1) the comparison of Filipina domestic workers in different countries, and the political change for Filipina domestic workers; (2) the nature of domestic labor; and how domestic labor should be done and by whom; (3) the class and ethnic differences between women; how the structural forces shape the competing and tentative relations among women, and how the interests of different women could be addressed without oppressing other women; (4) theoretical analysis on how class, gender and ethnicity intersect; how they co-operate with each other or sometimes reinforce one another in the contexts of Taiwan.



## Appendixes

### Appendix I

#### Whom can you turn to? Useful information for Filipina domestic workers

If you overwork, have no Sundays-off or confront any labor disputes with your employer, call the broker or the Foreign Workers' Counseling Centers. If the employers are at fault, and you want to transfer to another employer, you should file the complaint to MECO, the CLA and the NGOs. You can also ask Foreign Workers' Counseling Centers for mediation. If the employers want to terminate the contract for reasons other than your faults, and you agree, it is now possible to change the employer. You or your employer should go to local Employment Services Centers to register in order to transfer to other employers or you can ask brokers to do so.

#### 1. The broker

The broker might be the first person you seek for help when you have a difficult time with your employer. She/he might try to negotiate the disputes for you. But, any issues related to the laws or change of employer are difficult to be achieved through broker's negotiation. As this research suggests, Taiwanese brokers have their own business interests so that their main principle is to settle the disputes, however, with preference to the Taiwanese employers.

#### 2. Foreign Workers' Counseling Centers<sup>35</sup>

They are semi-official sponsored organizations. Among the Taiwanese governmental institutions, they are the most useful organizations for foreign workers because people work there speak English and Thai. They offer services such as counseling, labor dispute mediation, and legal consultation, etc. They are specialized in mediation. You can also ask for legal advice so that you might get to know which institution you should turn to. However, they have no legal rights to inspect your labor conditions or to reinforce the mediation results agreed by both parties.

#### *Foreign Workers' Counseling Centers*

Centers	Telephone numbers	Address
Taipei City	9F, No.67, DongHsin Street, NanGang District, Taipei	02-27864347 02-27864357 Fax: 02-27864383
Taipei County	10F, No. 62, ChungShan Road, Sec.2, PanChiao, Taipei County	02-29625874 02-29624710 Fax:02-29559090
TaoYuan County	8F, No.1, HsienFu Road, TaoYuan County	03-3344087 03-3341728

<sup>35</sup> Local Branches of these service centers have slightly different names. But, most importantly, they are always entitled foreign workers or Overseas Contract Workers.

		Fax:03-3341689
MiaoLi County	No.191, ChungCheng Road, MiaoLi County	037-363260 Fax:037-363261
TaiChung City	6-2F, No.122-19, ChungGang Road, Sec.2, SiTwen District, TaiChung City	04-2580765 04-2580561 Fax:04-2580595
TaiChung County	No.880, YuanHwan E. Road, FonYuan City, TaiChung County	04-5240131 04-5240132 Fax:04-5240438
ChangHwa County	7F. No. 209, MinZu Road, ChangHwa County	04-7271543 04-7268998 Fax:04-7269001
TaiNan County	3F, No.46-29, SanMin Road, HsinYin City, TaiNan County	06-6328407 06-6326546 Fax:06-6353418
YunLin County	No.46, PaoChang Road, DoLiu City, YunLin County	05-5338087 05-5338086 Fax:05-5343288
ChiaYi County	6F, No.278, MinChuan Road, ChiaYi County	05-2771114 05-2784551 Fax:05-2788236
Eastern Taiwan	No.159, GuoLien 2 <sup>nd</sup> Road, HuaLien City, HuaLien County	03-8342735 03-8342584 Fax:03-8349341
KaoHsiung City	1F, No.6, ChenChung Road, ChienCheng District, KaoHsiung City	07-8117543 Fax:07-8117548
KaoHsiung County	3F, No.117, DaBei Road, NiaoSong Hsiang, KaoHsiung County	07-7338842 Fax:07-7331153

### 3. The NGOs

- All of the NGOs I interviewed work with migrant workers. They help workers fight for rights and deal with legal issues with various tactics. TGWWC has her own lawyers to deal with lawsuits.
- Through the Migrant Worker Concern Desk (MWCD), you can get lists of Catholic Missions that help migrant workers around Taiwan.
- MWCD has published a very useful handbook *Taking The High Way: Life Guide For Migrant Workers In Taiwan*. It includes legal issues related to working lives, living tips, and directory of important agencies that help migrant workers. In contrast to the official propaganda *Handbook for Foreign Workers' in the Republic of China*, published by the Council of Labor Affairs, this handbook not only elaborates regulations related to your working rights, with regard to labor contract, labor welfare, labor disputes, etc. but also provides tips for workers to stay sound when working in Taiwan.

***Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that I interviewed for this research:***

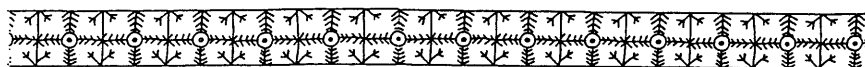
NGOs	Address	Telephone Numbers
Migrant Workers' Concern Desk (MWCD)	Room 906, No.2, ChungShan N. Road, Sec.1, Taipei	02-23117764, 02-23895247
Taiwan Grassroots Women Workers' Center(TGWWC)	4F, No.208, ChienKang Road, Taipei	02-27621006
Hope Workers' Center	3F, No.65, ChangChiang Road, ChungLi City, TaoYuan County	03-4255416, 03-4935134

**4. Manila Economic and Cultural Office in Taiwan (MECO) and Council of Labor Affairs (CLA)**

They are the highest ranked official organizations in charge of Filipina workers in Taiwan. MECO have Labor Representatives in Taipei, Taichung and Kaohsiung. By contrast, CLA has no special institutions that directly deal with foreign workers' labor disputes. You are very likely to be asked to go to Foreign Workers' Counseling Centers first, or they would suggest you go to Labor Affair Sections in local government, which should be in charge of foreign workers. However, few of them speak English. I do not list local labor administrative agencies here as they are of limited direct use for foreign workers and you can always find information about them in handbooks for foreign workers.

***Manila Economic and Cultural Office (MECO) in Taiwan***

Areas	Address	Phone Numbers of Labor Representatives
Taipei	4F, No. 107, ChungHsiao E. Rd, Sec.4, Taipei City	02-27787951 02-27787952
TaiChung	2F, 476, ChungCheng Rd, TaiChung City	04-2051306
KaoHsiung	2F, 146, SuWei 2 <sup>nd</sup> Rd, KaoHsiung City	07-3326257 07-3326294





## **Appendix II**

### **Interview guidelines for Filipina domestic workers**

Hi, nice to meet you. My name is Chin-ju. I am a student doing a dissertation on Filipina domestic workers in Taiwan. Would you like to tell me some of your experiences of working here? And, because I have to write up a report, do you mind that I tape record our conversation?

**[Name, age, sex, marital status, education]** Would you please introduce yourself? Where do you come from? How old are you? How long have you been here, in Taiwan? Are you married? Do you have any children?

**[The treatment and ethnic relations from Filipino's points of view]** Why do you come to Taiwan? How do you find it? Is it similar to or different from what you thought? How do you think about Taiwan people? Do they treat you bad or good?

**[Migration process and placement agencies]** Let's talk a little about your job. What did you do in the Philippines? How did you get the job? (What did you do for working in Taiwan? Can you choose the country you want to go?) Had you found a placement agency in order to get a job? How much did you pay? How much can you earn after paying the broker's fee? Can you come here without a broker? Can you choose your job to be a domestic worker or a factory worker? How long do you think you will stay in Taiwan?

**[Work contents, labor process, workers' rights and welfare]** How much do you earn? When you work as a domestic, what is the job content? Are you responsible for both childcare and housework? How many children do you charge? What about elderly care? Whom are you responsible for? Who 'inspects' or 'supervises' your working results? Do you work at their present? Do you think your employers have reasonable criteria for your working results? What does your employer do if they find you do something wrong or badly in your job? What are the job's inconveniences to you? Do you have a day off every week? Where do you sleep? Does the employer provide you with food? Do you eat together with them? How long do you work? Do you feel that you are maltreated or well-treated? What were the worst experiences you had when working? Do you feel uncomfortable to get alone with your male employer? Have you ever confronted any sexual harassment when work?

**[Relationships with the Family member]** Could you please describe the family you work for? How many people do they have in that household? What is the occupation of your employers? How do they treat you? Do you think that you have good relationships with them? Who do you like and dislike in the household? Do you think the children treat you fairly? Do you think cultural differences make it difficult for you to adapt to this society? Have you felt discriminated against?

**[Support network]** Do you feel lonely? What will you do, when you feel lonely? Do you have friends here? Can you make boyfriend here? Do you believe in any religion? Do you go to the church? If you have problems, whom do you turn to?

**[Strategies for survive]** How do you like the job? If you are maltreated, what will you do? When you are very unhappy with the working situations, what can you do? If you can change the situation, what do you want to change most?



### **Appendix III**

#### **Interview guidelines for employers**

1. How many people are in these households? What are their occupations and education, and ages?
2. How long ago have you recruited the domestic worker? How was the process?
  - Who suggested? Why?
  - Was there any argument? Who agreed and disagreed?
  - How did you reach the decision?
  - Who acted to find the maid?
  - How did you find the maid? How many maids have you recruited?
3. What has changed since?
  - emotional labor (what are her relationships with other family members?)
  - physical labor--(how domestic work was/is organized?)
4. Who supervises her work?
5. What do you want her to do? What is her job?
6. Where does she sleep? Do you have to provide her accommodation and food?
7. Do you feel odd that there is another woman living in the home? If so, how do you adjust to it?
8. Do you think she is a member of your family? Why?
9. How much do you pay per month? Do you think it's reasonable to her according to her working conditions?
10. How is the service of the placement agency? Are you satisfied with them?
11. Does different culture make it difficult to communicate or get along with her?  
If so, how do you adjust to it?
12. In the future, do you want to renew the contract or to employ other foreign maids? Why? or Why not? Will you suggest your friends or relatives to employ one?
13. Are you happy with having a servant in the household? Why and why not?



**Appendix IV****Table.3 Family structures of the households**

No	Female employer (age/ job)	Male employer (age/ job)	Charge (age/sex )	Others (relation to the employer/age)	Total members in the household (including the FDW)
1	33/ secretary	39/ clerk	2/F 5/F		5
2	40/part-time Chinese teacher	?/ own a company	6 8		5
3♥	51/ civil servants	55/ bank manager	82/M	2 adult children	2 <sup>36</sup>
4	38/ direct saleswoman	37/ bank manager	8/F 11/M	Parents/ 65, 62	7
5	44/ housekeeper	44/ factory manager	5/F	2 children/ 17, 15	6
6	48/ housekeeper	50/ general	5/M 9/F		5
7♥	75/ retired				3
8	30/ computer programmer	43/ running a music business	5/M 4/M		5
9	30s/ running family business	30s/ running family business	5/F, another two children	2 children at school age, parents/55, 60, and sisters in law/ 24,28.	10
10♥		44/ unemployed	74/F		3
11♥	70/ housekeeper		78/M		3
12	33/ school teacher	33/ employee in an airline	2/F, 5/M	parents, two brothers/26,28, and a sister/30.	11

♥ means the Filipino domestic worker worked as a care-taker.



<sup>36</sup>The caretaker lives together with the patient in an old house, while the employer and their family live in another house separately.

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# **The Taiwan Grassroots Women Workers' Centre**

## **1. Historical**

The Grassroots Women Workers' Centre was established in July 1988 for the purpose of providing opportunities for factory women and family subcontractors to reform male-dominated workers' unions, and to develop women workers' unions, and workers' movements through the promotion of feminism.

The Centre was founded and supported by human rights workers, feminists, and grassroots women workers. In the beginning, the organizational structure was dominated by women intellectuals.

However, after two years, it was realized that although intellectuals often have abundant social experiences, they ironically oppress the voices and feelings of grassroots women. In fact, intellectuals and working women lead drastically different lifestyles, and if intellectuals do not look at workers from the perspective of "learning," there is no way of expecting women workers to stand up and voice their opinions, neglecting that women workers are the marginalized of the marginalized. When an individual woman worker publicizes her concern, she also loses the support of her factory sisters, her family, and the society. This is an issue that is worth contemplating.

## **2. Organization**

After 1990, the organizational structure was transformed, to be led by workers while assisted by the advisors. Currently, there are ten advisors, two full-time organizers, ten workers and two aborigine women who make up the operational staff of the organization. Eight lawyer legal assistance term.

We meet at factory, workers' house, Urban aborigines community, when in need, and experience shows that the most effective method of working is to provide assistance for women workers themselves to support each other. All of us are volunteers.

This is an organization of women only. Peoples' organization no support organization. Grassroots women decide the mode of discussion, and women may bring their children to discussions. We try to include children in our programs. Some topics of discussion include: experiences of struggles of Asia women workers, laws and the situation of investor-laborer disputes in Taiwan, working environment and working conditions, and analysis of individual cases.

### 3. Services

Women workers in Taiwan under the male patriarchal institution are in urgent need of organizing. Grassroots Women Workers' Centre offers:

- a. Community activities.
- b. Legal advice.
- c. Court case assistance.
- d. Attorney-at-law on court levels.
- e. Dealing with employers.
- f. Petitions to the government.
- g. Information to the public.
- h. Network with sending countries.
- i. Visits to detention center and prison.
- j. Temporary shelter for women and men. And
- k. **Publishes:**



- (1) Female Workers in Taiwan.(ISSN 1029-2810)

Taiwan's first and most authoritative English-language quarterly in this field.

- (2) Asia Women Workers ,in Chinese
- (3) A handbook for foreign laborers, in English and Tagalog language.
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**Publisher : Taiwan Grassroots Women Workers' Centre**

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**Published on April 20, 1999**

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**ISBN: 957-97879-0-5    NT\$:100**

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