



# New Global Politics of Reproductive Labor: Gendered Labor and Marriage Migration

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## Abstract

The feminization of international migration nowadays has demonstrated a new global politics of reproductive labor (work necessary for the reproduction of families). This paper reviews recent studies that manifest similarity, affinity, and continuity across multiple forms of reproductive labor carried out by migrant women in four aspects. First, the recruitment of women as foreign maids or foreign brides provides class-specific parallel strategies to the global care crisis. Second, paid and unpaid forms of reproductive labor constitute intersecting circuits of labor and marriage migration through which women partake in continuous migration. Third, various categories of migrant women are discursively conflated and attached to similar images as sexualized others. Finally, global care chains not only involve migrant reproductive labor conducted at home but also operate on the level of social reproduction as indicated by the expansion of international nursing migration.

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The traditional literature of migration has assumed the role of men as workers who initiate emigration and women as followers who reproduce the next generation of immigrants. This simplified picture no longer describes the complex reality of international migration nowadays. A growing number of women, often on their own, emigrate to work, with or without authorized documents. The feminization of migration is especially significant in occupations like domestic service, care work, health service, and sex work (Anderson 2000; Chang 2000; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002; Huang et al. 2005; Kempadoo and Doezema 1998; Oishi 2005). In addition, many women emigrate by virtue of marriage. Rates of cross-border marriages have increased widely across East Asia, Australia, and North America (Constable 2003a, 2005; Thai 2008).

These various groups of migrant women are united under the umbrella that they are all recruited to provide reproductive labor, whether in paid or unpaid form, in receiving countries. The term 'reproductive labor', in a broader sense, describes labor activities conducted to achieve the reproduction of human beings intra- and inter-generationally. It covers biological reproduction (giving birth) as well as the work necessary for the reproduction

of families (Engels 1943/72). Reproductive labor maintains family members not just on the level of substance (such as preparing food, cleaning home, and laundering), but also emotionally and socially (including caring for and socializing children, providing emotional support for adults, and maintaining kin and community ties; Lorber 1994).

Globalization has triggered the expansion of international migration and facilitates what Rhacel Parreñas (2001) calls 'the international division of reproductive labor'. Extending Evelyn Nakano Glenn's (1992) formulation of 'the racial division of reproductive labor' in an international context, Parreñas keenly observed the phenomenon 'the international transfer of caretaking', which refers to the three-tier transfer of reproductive labor among women located in sending and receiving countries (madam, migrant domestic, and the local maid of migrant domestic). Drawing on Parreñas's work, Arlie Hochschild (2000: 131) coined the term 'global care chains', which describes 'a series of personal links between people across the globe based on the paid or unpaid work of caring'. These concepts have amended the masculinist bias in the studies of migration and globalization, which have privileged the roles of state, market, and productive labor (Yeates 2004a); they have also challenged the implicit nationalist framework of care studies by emphasizing the contexts of global inequalities and transnational processes (Zimmerman et al. 2006).

Migrant reproductive labor conducted in private households can be unpaid (migrant women as wives, mothers, and daughters-in-law) or paid (migrant women working as in-home nannies, maids, or caretakers). The paid labor is also done in institutional settings, including less skilled categories like caretakers in nursing homes and more skilled categories like nurses in hospitals. This paper does not attempt to provide a comprehensive review about the experiences of migrant women, but focuses on recent studies that have demonstrated the various links among the multiple forms of migrant reproductive labor. The earlier literature has tended to treat these categories as separate subjects of research. Along with other scholars, I advocate an approach of relational thinking to highlight the structural and discursive continuities of migrant reproductive labor. I argue that these various links and circuits have manifested a new global politics of reproductive labor.

This paper is divided into the following sections: The first one looks at the two most researched categories of migrant women, foreign maids, and foreign brides, as parallel recruitments and structural continuities. The second examines how a diversity of migration circuits can intersect and intertwine in the life paths of individual women. The third section discusses how popular imaginations conflate various categories of migrant women under the discursive construct of sexualized and racialized others. The last section adds in professional/skilled migration to expand the definition of reproductive labor. In conclusion, I encourage future researchers to adopt a

relational analytic framework by bridging categories of migrant reproductive labor as structural continuities while cautioning against the pitfall of blurring categories in the discourse of 'trafficked women'.

### **Parallel recruitments, structural continuities**

When I was working on a project about migrant domestic workers, many people, inside and outside the academia, said to me: 'Oh, you study foreign brides'. Their confusion puzzled me because these two categories of migrant women differ in important ways. They partake in distinct trajectories of migration: one temporary and the other permanent. They are differentially incorporated in receiving countries. The guest worker regime, widely adopted in Asia and Europe, restricts the access of blue-collar migrant workers to immigration and naturalization.

However, I later realized that there is some sociological significance behind people's confusion. Foreign maids and foreign brides, the two categories of migrant women who have attracted the most attention from researchers, represent parallel solutions to the care crisis in receiving countries as a result of gender and family transformations. While upper-class and middle-class households hire migrant domestics to outsource housework and care work, working-class households seek foreign wives to provide unpaid domestic labor (Wang 2007). In other words, the recruitment of migrant women, as maids or wives, provides class-specific solutions to the alleged shortage of reproductive labor, constructed as either waged work (care deficit) or kin labor (bride deficit; Lan 2008).

The parallel recruitments of foreign maids and foreign brides not only respond to class-specific demands but also supply different yet interconnected types of migrant reproductive labor. In an earlier article (Lan 2003), I have challenged the dichotomous categorization between 'maid' and 'madam' by articulating a fluid, dynamic concept of 'the continuity of domestic labor', or more broadly, 'the continuity of reproductive labor'. This line of thinking has been advocated by Nakano Glenn (1992), who views servitude and service work as historical continuities that characterize the racial division of paid reproductive labor. I further suggest that we analyze unpaid household labor and waged domestic work as structural continuities that characterize the feminization of reproductive labor across the public and private spheres. Individual women, during their life course, may engage in and travel across various forms of reproductive labor that are nevertheless consistently constructed as women's work.

Other scholars have also highlighted the importance of linking labor migration and marriage migration, or in my words, paid and unpaid forms of migrant reproductive labor. Nicola Piper and Mina Roces (2003) in their edited book *Wife or Worker?* have collected an impressive group of papers about Asian migrant women. The editors criticized the reductionist tendency in the existing literature: 'Those who studied marriage migration

paid little attention to the women's subsequent entry into the labor market, and yet the studies about women as migrant workers often ignore their other roles as mother or wife' (p. 2). Although not all the papers in the volume engage directly in the theme of problematizing the distinction between foreign workers and foreign wives, this book as a collective project demonstrates the diverse experience of women migrants and explores various migration routes leading to or arising out of marriage.

It should be noted that the categories of migrant domestic workers and marriage migrants both cover a heterogeneous group of migrant women. There are differences in the content of work and the degree of specification, such as the distinction between non-intimate domestic labor (maid, cleaner) and intimate care labor (nanny, caregiver for elder or patient). The patterns of employment also vary, including live-in, day worker, and part-timer. For instance, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001) has examined how these variations impact the social status and labor conditions of domestic workers as well as the dynamics of employer–worker interactions.

There is also significant heterogeneity among women who move by virtue of marriage. They meet their foreign spouses through various venues and processes, including commercial agencies, pen pal clubs, relatives, friends, and so on. The couples may get married right after matchmaking or after years of correspondences. It is problematic to lump them together under the stigmatizing label of 'mail-order-bride' (e.g. Glodava and Onizuka 1994). Recent studies have challenged a common view that women who emigrate to marry must be impoverished or undereducated. Nicole Constable (2003b) and Hung Cam Thai (2008) both observed that college-educated Chinese and Vietnamese women seek out marriage partners in the United States as a strategy to escape less than ideal marital opportunities or gender constraints at home.

Despite the complexity and diversity in cross-border marriages, it is usually women who emigrate to marry and not men. As Nicole Constable (2005: 15) nicely put it, this pattern illustrates a 'gendered geographies of power' in which 'women, by virtue of their social positioning, can take advantage of opportunities for mobility that are sometimes unavailable to men'. Constable has identified the norm of 'marrying up' that guides the phenomenon of 'spatial hypergamy'. I add that the feminization of reproductive labor and private domesticity is another factor that shapes women's privileged positions in the international marriage market, but the same factor could render them vulnerable and marginalized in the new country as I will discuss later.

### **Continuous migration, intersecting circuits**

The last section has shown how the demands for migrant reproductive labor in both labor and marriage markets shape multiple routes of migration. Migrant women may combine or transfer circuits in a path of continuous

migration. As Piper and Roces (2003: 7) have argued, 'migration is by and large a continuous process where women negotiate several roles or swap the priority of roles'. Ethnographic findings demonstrate that the boundaries applied to categorical forms of migration such as 'marriage', 'contract work', and 'family reunification' are porous and fluid (McKay 2003: 25). In reality, migrant women often partake in multiple forms of migration to improve their life chances given their constrained opportunities in a racialized labor market.

### *1. From paid reproductive labor to unpaid reproductive labor*

Researchers have observed similar situations, out of different contexts, that foreign domestic workers may turn into foreign wives. In my research (Lan 2003, 2006), quite a few Filipina and Indonesian migrant domestic workers received marriage proposals from their Taiwanese employers, who are usually middle-aged divorced or widowed men. Romantic intimacy is involved in some cases, but in others, marriage proposals serve as an extension of labor contracts when migrant women are hired to take care of the men's frail or ill parents. Many migrant workers are keenly aware that if they accept an employer's proposal, they will continue to perform similar labor duties, only in the name of family obligation. The workload placed on a wife may even be intensified since the 'labor of love' offered by a family member is supposed to be incommensurable (thus unpaid) and incessant (no days off).

Agencies recruiting workers for domestic service in Canada even describe international marriages as a potential gain of labor migration in their marketing plans. In Deirdre McKay's article (2003: 46), one advertisement quoted a marriage proposal from a Canadian employer: 'Why be a Nanny; marry me and my children will call you Mommy'. McKay argues that the deskilling experience of Filipina migrants under the Live-in-Caregiver-Program (LCP) is a critical factor that pushes them toward international marriages. All participants in the LCP program need to have a college degree or some professional training and experience (nursing, midwifery or teaching), but their LCP work in Canada is considered to be 'just babysitting'. Racialized stereotypes (Filipina = domestic helper) further curtail their opportunities of seeking mobility in the Canadian labor market. A Filipina informant in her study clearly indicated the connection between deskilling and marriage: 'I don't want to be just a nanny ... Even though we have a good education, it doesn't matter to them. Because we're Filipino we are only a domestic helper ... so then I got married ... to my employer' (McKay 2003: 23).

There are multiple reasons why women migrating as workers later prolong their journey as wives. Marriage is an option for them to escape the deskilling experience of domestic work and a means to gain residency and citizenship in receiving countries (McKay 2003). Their desire to seek

mates overseas is driven by a feeling of alienation after leaving home countries for a substantial amount of time. The stigma imposed upon overseas contract workers, especially entertainers in Japan, also impedes their chance to seek marriage in home villages (Lan 2006). In addition, because divorce is not an option in the Philippines, some Filipina migrant workers creatively utilize legal inconsistencies across borders to remarry foreign men overseas (Constable 2003b). These studies piece together a complex picture in which international marriages demonstrate not only the agency of migrant women but also the structural constraints they confront and negotiate with.

Migrant women enter an international marriage not only to seek a partner who can promise economic security and immigration opportunities but also 'to redefine themselves as wives and to reclaim a respectable marital status' (Constable 2003b: 163). When shifting from paid reproductive labor to unpaid reproductive labor, migrant women can remove themselves from the stigmatized jobs of 'maid' and 'nanny' and relocate themselves as 'honey' and 'mommy', whose reproductive labor is granted more moral currency and social recognition.

The experience of overseas domestic work becomes a positive qualification for women applicants in seeking mates overseas. Yet, there is an imminent contradiction in their intersecting routes of migration. As Piper and Roces (2003: 6) has pointed out, women who use international marriage as a way to escape domestic work, but their foreign husbands see them as marriageable material precisely because of their association with domestic work. For instance, McKay's Filipina informants revealed that when she declared her citizen status, the Canadian men who had approached her lost interest because they prefer newly arrived migrants who then fit in with the stereotypes of innocence, naïveté, and servility toward their husbands (McKay 2003: 41). As a result, marriage does not always save migrant women from the hardship of domestic service, and many of them continue to pursue some forms of paid reproductive labor as I will discuss in the next section.

Some receiving states, however, set up barriers to prevent categorical transmutation from labor migration to marriage migration, more concretely, to ensure that temporary migration of unskilled workers does not become permanent through marriage. The most explicit example is the marriage restriction imposed upon foreign contract workers in Singapore. As a condition to secure permission to work in Singapore, a foreign worker must agree not to marry a Singaporean citizen or permanent resident without the prior approval of the immigration office. It should be noted that this restriction applies even after the foreign worker has finished or cancelled the labor contract. Eugene K.B. Tan (2008: 84) points out the class and racial pretexts of this pervasive rule: it 'marks this group of workers, especially female domestic workers, as transient and "unacceptable" for inclusion into Singapore society'.

## 2. From unpaid reproductive labor to paid reproductive labor

Migrant women who emigrate via marriage take on social roles other than wives and mothers in the new country. Many of them seek employment in formal or informal sectors. Their actual labor activities demonstrate that the boundary between paid and unpaid reproductive labor provided by migrant women is fluid and permeable.

Evelyn Nakano Glenn (1986) has offered a historical study about Japanese immigrant brides in the United States. Whether arriving around the beginning of the 20th century (*issei*) and after the Second World War ('war bride'), these migrant women were largely employed in the sectors of farming, personal service, retail trade, and especially domestic service, and they often continued to be trapped in these 'occupational ghettos' after becoming citizens. Nakano Glenn identifies four major factors that constrain their labor market opportunities (p. 75): first, they preferred work that could fit around family responsibilities; second, their work usually involved tasks as an extension to women's work in the home; third, these labor-intensive, low-waged jobs reduced competition with native women; and finally, these jobs took place in a family-owned or ethnic enterprise where language difficulties and racial discrimination did not constitute barriers to employment.

Although global economy and local labor markets have restructured over the decades, immigrant wives today face similar reasons that constrain their job opportunities in the new land. Korean-Chinese (*Chaoxianzu*) women who migrated to South Korea for marriage, as well as Southeast Asian wives in Taiwan, are largely employed in informal sectors of reproductive labor as maids, nannies, cleaners, and caretakers (Lee 2005; Wang 2007). These jobs are perceived as highly feminized, casualized, and deskilled, thus not in favor by native women. In contrast to restriction and suspicion toward boundary crossing from labor migration to marriage migration, the state tends to support migrant wives to extend their migrant reproductive labor from domestic spheres to labor markets. In Taiwan, the government encourages immigrant wives to fill in these jobs as an alternative solution to the care crisis, avoiding the thorny issue of border control involved in the recruitment of migrant domestic and care workers.

In Japan, according to the research of Nobue Suzuki (2008), a significant number of Filipina wives met their Japanese husbands while working in Japan as entertainers. Some of the women continue or begin to work as hostesses after marriage in order to augment their family incomes. This job offers migrant Asian women relatively decent wages in comparison to the other jobs available for them in a labor market marked by racial and sexual discriminations. In addition, many Filipina wives tried to avoid negative stereotypes (see the next section) by taking more socially acceptable jobs such as helpers and caretakers, which have been in great shortage given the aging population in Japan (Suzuki 2007). Interestingly,

Filipina migrants perceive a structural continuity and affinity across their various life paths as a wife, caretaker, and even hostess. As Suzuki (2008: 81) described, 'these former-entertainers-turned-caregivers are fully aware ... that their job is to continue providing care and emotional labor, previously for mostly *ojisan* (middle-aged men), and now for *ojiisan* (old men) and old women'.

The paid job of sex work and the unpaid sex labor in marriage sometimes overlap and intertwine. According to Preparirat R. Mix and Nicola Piper (2003), there are indeed 'paper marriages' or 'marriage of convenience' among Thai women married to German men. To them, marriage is a means to secure residential status and/or to facilitate their work in the German sex industries. However, some other Thai women wish to leave the business by getting married, but many of them continue to be sex workers or become sex workers because their husbands are unemployed and/or they lack job options without sufficient skills in the German or English language.

In addition, many non-citizen migrant women are confined to full-time unpaid reproductive labor and deprived legal venues to paid work as a result of migration. The most referred example consists of 'trailing wives' of professional male migrants. In addition, international students' wives, known as F-2 visa holders in the United States, are another group of migrant women who emigrate to support the studies of their husbands (Kim 2006). The consequence of 'migration-as-spouse' is not gender-neutral. Women who relocate through family migration often experience a higher degree of deskilling, unemployment, and downward mobility than men do (Kofman and Raghuram 2006: 296).

Women also migrate as the followers of their children. Taiwanese mothers from upper-middle- and middle-class families have moved to Canada and the United States to accompany their children enrolled in primary and secondary schools (Chee 2003). The new rich from People's Republic of China have also followed the pattern of 'student migration' since the late 1990s; their destinations include not only North America but also English-speaking Singapore. The Singaporean government allows these 'study mothers' (*pei du ma ma*) to stay on a long-term social visit pass with restricted rights to paid employment (Yeoh and Huang 2007).

Maria W. L. Chee (2003: 152) has elaborated on the peculiarity of migration-as-mothers: 'These mothers left their home countries in order to be ideal mothers and fulfill their motherhood roles. In prioritizing their children's lives (the next generation) over career and spouse (since they are separate from their husbands), these women privilege motherhood.' Being a full-time wife or mother may be a voluntary choice for wealthier migrant women, but it can be an imposed lifestyle by immigration regulations or because the skills and cultural capital (education credentials and language proficiency) of migrant women become devalued or unrecognized after crossing borders. Migrant wives and mothers without financial support



may have to seek off-the-book employment in informal sectors, forming another circuit that connects unpaid and paid migrant reproductive labor.

### **Conflating images, sexualized others**

The last section has indicated that the decision-making of migrant women – about whether to work and which job to fill – concern not only material interest such as wage and labor conditions but also symbolic interest and moral currency. There are implicit moral orders that stratify the multiple forms of feminized reproductive labor and channel the shifting paths of migrant women. For instance, some aspire to the role of wife as an end of their migration as a maid or a sex worker, and some others prefer the socially acceptable jobs of helper and caretaker to the stigmatized sex work. In this section, I further discuss how these various categories of migrant reproductive labor (maid, mistress, mother, wife, and prostitute) are often conflated under similar moral discourses that capture migrant women as sexualized and racialized others.

Researchers of migrant domestic workers have observed the contentious relationship between maid and madam (Cheng 2006; Lan 2006). The presence of another woman in the intimate realm has stirred feelings of anxiety and insecurity for female employers. Migrant women, in particular, are constructed as sexualized bodies and moral suspects of ‘husband-stealers’. The association with sex tourism and mail-order brides fuels stereotypes about Southeast Asian women as cunning and promiscuous subjects who may lure local men in exchange for immigration (Constable 1997a). Some employers thus carefully manage the physical appearances and clothing styles of migrant domestics (Constable 1997b; Yeoh and Huang 1998); recruitment agencies also attempt to desexualize and defeminize migrant workers by transforming their outlooks and hairstyles (Lan 2006).

Migrant women as ‘study mothers’ are vulnerable to similar moralizing discourses. According to Brenda Yeoh and Shirlena Huang (2007), media reports in Singapore often conflate study mothers with the ‘China girl’ associated with prostitution. To prevent the migration of ‘moonlighting mamas’ under the cover of ‘giving their children a better life’, the Singaporean government has banned study mothers from working during the first 12 months; afterward, they are permitted to work in any sector with the following exceptions: massage parlors, bars and karaoke lounges, food stalls, and as domestic maids. Yeoh and Huang (2007) argue that the reason why study mothers are constructed as dangerous others that threaten the fabric of the family lies in the situation that unaccompanied migrant women are seen to be ‘out of place’, unlike trailing spouses and expatriate wives who are settled by virtue of linking their ‘place’ and ‘identity’ to men.

Even women who migrate for the purpose of marriage are not immune from the trope of sexualization. Xenophobia and anti-immigration sentiment often target migrant women as suspects for bogus marriages and illegal

employment, with their husbands as an accomplice or a victim. The host community, often including the husband's family, holds lingering suspicion about the potential for foreign wives to 'run away', that is, to deviate from the normative gender roles and enter the illegal terrain of sex work. In Japan, Filipina migrants are commonly labeled with the defiling term '*Japayuki*' (Japan-bound), which refers to entertainers with the connotation of prostitutes. The highly sexualized image of *Japayuki* overlooks differences within the group of Filipina migrants and haunts them as a whole, including those married to Japanese men, whether they previously worked as entertainers or not. Some Filipina wives have attempted to transcend this stereotype by organizing charity events and deploying symbols and images that valorize middle-class womanhood (Suzuki 2008).

Studies utilizing a comparative design further reveal discursive proximity and location differences between various categories of migrant women. I compare how foreign maids and foreign brides in Taiwan are associated with similar sexualized images and yet subject to distinct strategies of sexual control. State power pressures foreign wives to perform intimacy and reproduce offspring, but places migrant domestics as disposable workers and desexualized women (Lan 2008). In another example of comparison, Yeoh and Huang (2007) found that media discourses in Singapore tend to capture foreign maids as passive victims of Singaporean men's lust or sexual abuse, while Chinese study mothers are accorded with active agency, posed as predatory and potentially dangerous.

### **Incorporating skilled migrants and social reproduction**

The existing literature on migrant reproductive labor has mostly focused on semi-skilled or unskilled workers like maids and nannies, and paid less attention to skilled and professional migrants such as nurses. Eleonore Kofman and Parvati Raghuram (2006) criticize that the analysis of global care chains has narrowed the definition of reproduction by confining it to the home. They advocate that researchers take account of the contribution of skilled migrant women and expand the definition of reproduction to include forms of social reproduction organized by the state.

Nicola Yeates (2004a,b) also suggests that we broaden the application of the global care chain concept to capture the diversity of care workers and care contexts, including their different levels in the skill and occupational hierarchies (semi-skilled and skilled in addition to unskilled), their different work settings (institutional as well as household settings), and their different types of care (health, education, sexual service, and social care service). The expanded framework will encompass groups of care workers as diverse as nurses, nuns, and sex workers.

The most significant wave of migration for social reproductive labor is the recruitment of foreign-trained nurses. In addition to the shortage in nursing labor in industrialized countries, another driving force for international

recruitment is the attempts of neo-liberal states to reduce the cost of social reproduction (Kofman and Raghuram 2006). Foreign-educated nurses occupy approximately five to ten percentage of the nursing labor force in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States; the proportions go even higher in New Zealand (20 percent) and Switzerland (30 percent; Kingma 2007). Recently, the aging populations in Asia have also enlarged the demand for migrant healthcare workers, especially in Japan (Suzuki 2007) and Singapore (Huang et al. 2007).

The sending countries for transnational nursing labor are diverse, with Australia, India, the Philippines, South Africa, and the United Kingdom as the leading sources (Kline 2003). Some nations, such as Canada, are both a source and a destination. During the 1990s, an outflow of 27,100 Canadian registered nurses (RNs) migrated to the United States due to the lack of full-time employment after the restructuring of the Canadian health system; meanwhile, 17 percent of the current nursing population in Canada is filled by foreign-educated personnel (Little 2007). The direction of migration can also change over time; for instance, Ireland used to be a major exporter of nurses to the United Kingdom for decades, but it has become a major receiver of nurses from India, the Philippines, and even the United Kingdom (Yeates 2004b).

The Philippines is a major supplier of migrant nurses, but the nation itself has also suffered from the shortage of trained medical professionals. Historian Catherine Ceniza Choy (2003), in her book entitled *Empire of Care*, examines this irony. She argues that the origin of the 20th-century migration of Filipino nurses to the United States lies in the creation of an Americanized hospital training system during the colonial rule. Although the colonizer has left, the culture of American imperialism persists today, shaping the desire of Filipino nurses toward US emigration as well as the racialized images of Filipinos in the United States.

Although Choy did not link her study of nursing migration to the literature of migrant domestic service, I find them as parallels that demonstrate global inequalities in the division of reproductive labor. Similar to 'global nanny chains', which exacerbate disparity in the quality of childcare between families across national and class lines, international nurse migration widens the inequalities of health service between sending and receiving countries. The shortage of highly skilled nurses and the massive retraining of physicians have created severe problems for the Philippine health system, including the closure of many hospitals (Lorenzo et al. 2007).

However, migrant nurses, despite their professional degrees, are not immune to the experience of deskilling. For instance, many overseas qualified nurses (OQNs) in Australia, especially those without English-speaking backgrounds, are consigned to 'subprofessional employment' or temporary labor market withdraw because it requires a substantial period of time for them to improve English skills, pass the compulsory ESL test, and secure

qualifications' recognition (Hawthorne 2001). In addition, foreign nurses are also vulnerable to racial discrimination and cultural displacement in the new workplace and the receiving society. Language skills and the associated cultural identities have become integral elements in the performance of migrant reproductive labor. Hospital groups and recruitment agencies have established contracts with companies that prepare foreign nurses in accent modification and cultural grooming; making sure that 'they must be fit for duty, communicate in English, and be accent free' (Brush and Vasupuram 2006: 183).

The most noted difference between skilled migrant nurses and unskilled migrant caregivers lies in their differential incorporation into the host communities. Most receiving states have preferential regulations for skilled, professional migrants by granting them the access to naturalization and citizenship and the entitlement to family unification. Unlike guest workers who usually stay overseas in separation from their families, migrant nurses are able to sponsor their families, especially their children and husbands, after a period of initial settlement. This pattern of migration is drastically different from the traditional scenario of 'trailing wives'. It has led to contested transformation in gender relations and the division of reproductive labor at home as reported by the interesting research of Sheba Mariam George (2005) about the migration of Indian nurses and their husbands to California.

## Conclusion

Recent scholarship has successfully challenged the traditional paradigm of migration that privileges the experience of mobile males in the service of global productive sectors. Rich ethnographic findings have demonstrated the significance of reproductive labor provided by migrant women as an integral part of global economy and inequalities. This paper has reviewed recent studies that manifest similarity, affinity, and continuity across multiple forms of migrant reproductive labor. Their structural and discursive continuities have manifested a new global politics of reproductive labor constituted by four key elements.

First, the global care deficit has emerged in relatively wealthy Northern and Southern countries. The labor shortage impacts private households across the class spectrum as well as nursing and medical institutions. Second, the expansion of international migration and global networks has facilitated the labor supply of migrant women, who aspire to experience social and geographical mobility. Third, the persistent feminization of reproductive labor is a double-edged sword for migrant women. It creates job niches and migration circuits for women, but it also devalues their waged labor and traps them in certain occupational ghettos. Finally, despite the porous boundaries and fluid circuits between paid and unpaid forms of reproductive labor, many nation-states have enforced legal regulations to avoid or minimize

transgression of migration categories such as 'marriage', 'work', and 'family reunification'. So they can secure border control and govern migrant women as sexualized and racialized others.

We need future research to explore how 'women are differentially incorporated into the global economy through reproductive sector (Kofman and Raghuram 2006: 283) and how women exert agency to travel across various migration circuits and job niches enabled by the new global politics of reproductive labor. While noting the importance of bridging various categories of migrant reproductive labor, we should be cautious of what Nicole Constable (2006) calls 'unproductive blurs' or 'unwarranted blurs' – some academic, popular and activist literatures, often utilizing a framework of 'trafficking', treat brides, maids, and sex workers as commonalities without adequately considering differences among these categories of migrant women. Only by examining parallels, linkages and continuities, as well as contrasts, disruptions and discontinuities, among the multiple forms of migrant reproductive labor can we understand the intersection of structural forces and subjective agency in shaping the lived experiences of migrant women.

### Short Biography

Pei-Chia Lan is Associate Professor of Sociology at National Taiwan University. Her fields of specialty include gender, work, and international migration. She has authored papers in journals like *Signs*, *Social Problems*, *Feminist Studies*, *Gender & Society*, and *The Sociological Quarterly*. Her book *Global Cinderellas: Migrant Domesticities and Newly Rich Employers in Taiwan* (Duke 2006) has won 2007 Distinguished Book Award from the Sex and Gender Section of the American Sociological Association and 2007 ICAS Book Prize: Best Study in Social Science from the International Convention of Asian Scholars. She received a PhD in Sociology from Northwestern University. She has held a postdoctoral fellowship from University of California, Berkeley and completed a Fulbright fellowship at New York University.

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