

The social networks and contacts in the migratory and employment process: the case of the Filipino women domestic workers in Tokyo

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This abstract is based on a dissertation which analyzed the mechanisms of social networks in the migration and employment process. The dissertation specifically tried to find out how social networks had contributed to the migratory and employment process of Filipino women domestic workers in Tokyo. How foreign employers based in Japan accessed the domestic workers was also tackled. Further, the dissertation undertook to identify the kind of residence and employment status available for foreign domestic workers, which was essential in the analysis.

The dissertation began by examining the Neo-classical theory and the Todaro's model since the choice for Tokyo by most of the 50 respondents interviewed was mostly determined by the wage differentials and the remuneration it could offer. These two theories, however, cannot fully explain the presence of foreign domestic workers in Japan where labor admission policy restricts the entry of non-skilled foreign workers. At the macro level, the study of global cities is crucial in the reproduction of this sector of workers. In these cities, there exists a burgeoning demand for service labor to cater to the lifestyle needs of highly specialized professionals.

The new immigration amendments to Japanese law in 1990 expanded the job categories, which relate mostly to the highly specialized occupations. The amendments also led to the granting of residence ("Designated Activities") and work permits to foreign domestic workers to work for the households of foreign employers. The ingress, therefore, of Filipino women domestic workers to Japan comes indirectly with the entry of foreign professionals who have the culture of hiring domestic workers to substitute in the reproductive sphere of their households.

At the micro level, since it is extremely difficult for an intending domestic worker to find employment in Japan and as there are no recruitment and employment agencies to facilitate his/her employment, contacts

with prospective employers tend to be the only way for the intending migrants to obtain legal working permits. The finding showed that Filipino domestic workers gained entry to Japan not through any formal recruitment and employment agencies but through their social networks and contacts in the destination area, which are principally based on kinship and friendship relations. Not only limited to the migration and employment processes, these networks also provide adjustment support in the destination country. This is clearly illustrated when these workers are relatives. Further, the findings indicate that interpersonal ties provide a generalized phenomenon called "support". The Filipino women domestic workers obtain forms of emotional aid and employment assistance from their different social ties. This is also attributed to their geographic proximity to one another, which fosters denser and closer ties and whose components form channels through which job information and other news can flow.

In conclusion, the presence of these Filipino domestic workers in Tokyo is the product of the emergence of Japan as a global city. However, Japan, to date, does not allow the employment of the foreign domestic workers except in circumstances where a foreign employer assumes responsibility and sponsors the employment of a domestic worker. In this case, since their labor is limited to foreign employers, foreign domestic workers do not belong to the national labor market of Japan. This may cause some problems since there is no way for a trade union to develop and protect their rights as workers.

These findings on the Filipino domestic workers raise some significant issues that need to be examined in future research. One issue is the political implication for global capital as a whole. This appears to be just a regional occurrence but is actually linked to women's struggles in other regions of the world.