

What is this literature review about?

Since the 1990's, East and Southeast Asia have undergone major socio-economic transformations that have made them significant sites for the study of migration. The rapid economic development of Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore have made them emerging migrant destinations. On the other hand, the transition to a market-based economy in countries like China, Vietnam, and the Philippines since the 1980s have propelled a flow of migrants out of these countries. There has been a major increase in women's migration within these regions, the two largest forms being **migration for domestic work** and **cross-border marriages**. Generally, research on labour migration has evolved separately from research about cross-border marriage. "Women's Migration for Domestic Work and Cross-Border Marriage in East and Southeast Asia" is unique as it brings together both sets of literature to illuminate the interconnected processes that shape women's migration experiences across this region.

Why is it important?

The importance of this literature review lies in its ability to enrich our understanding of women's experience of migration and move beyond a framework that sees women migrants as either "wife or worker". The review looks at how the pathways for domestic labourers and migrant wives are embedded in the reproduction of women's domesticity, or in other words, the persistent notion that housework should be relegated to women.

Which factors influence and motivate women to migrate?

Receiving country dynamics: Rapid economic development in newly industrialized countries Japan and Hong Kong has transformed them into migrant receiving countries. An increase in women's education and participation in the labour force, paired with rural-urban migration created a demand for domestic workers in middle-class households ("care deficit") and a demand for wives for rural and working class men ("bride deficit"). These "deficits" are grounded in social norms dictating that women are responsible for caring for their children and in-laws and that heterosexual marriage is a key institution for men to enact their masculinity. Middle-class women in receiving countries subcontract care of their in-laws and children to migrant workers. Cross border marriage allows men in receiving countries to escape the stigma of singlehood, while still relegating much of the gendered care responsibilities to their migrant wives.

Sending country dynamics: Uneven development in new market-based economies like China and Vietnam transformed them into migrant sending countries. Erosion of social security nets fostered inequality between rural and urban areas, propelling states to adopt labour-export policies and women to migrate to achieve economic mobility. Women's desires to migrate also stem from (sometimes contradictory) gendered ideologies. Women migrate in order to fulfill what they perceive to be their role providing for their natal families as well as to embody a modern womanhood through commercial consumption and global experiences.

Who regulates this migration and how?

In both marriage and domestic labour migration, political and economic relations between states shape migration flows. State governments, commercial brokers, and other institutions and networks are involved in mediating the migration of women in East and Southeast Asia. The authors found that states take different approaches to the two forms of migration – sending states are more proactive in mobilizing women for domestic work, while receiving states do more to recruit and manage marriage migration.

What challenges do migrant women face and how do they deal with them?

Domestic worker challenges:

- *Denial of citizenship.* While marriage migrants are granted a route to legal citizenship, domestic workers are banned from long-term settlement.
- *Restricted reproductive rights.* Domestic workers must undergo mandatory pregnancy tests and face termination or deportation if found to be pregnant.
- *Spatial exclusion.* Domestic workers are confined to the homes of their employers and excluded from public spaces.
- *Control over their bodies.* Domestic workers' intimate place in the home gives rise to social anxieties that lead them to being subjected to disciplinary techniques to control their appearance, behaviour and sexuality.

Modes of resistance: Migrant women are actively negotiating with employers to create counterspaces and to resist marginalization in public space. Women are also reclaiming control over their bodies by pursuing romantic and sexual relationships. They are also engaging in “cross border organization” to form grassroots coalitions that fight for worker and human rights.

Marriage migrant challenges:

- *Suspicion and stigma.* Migrant wives are stigmatized and scrutinized for engaging in “fake marriages”. They are often cast as “opportunists” and the legitimacy of their membership in the nation is questioned. This results in increased surveillance of migrant women and

- *Assimilation efforts.* Migrant-receiving nations like South Korea and Taiwan implement assimilation programs for migrant wives that often focus on wives' domestic roles and reinforce the image of marriage migrants as inferior and helpless.

Modes of resistance: Migrant women counter the social stigma they face by organizing public events and employ the gendered morality attached to their roles as wife and mother to protect against stigma. Marriage migrants have also transformed the assimilation classes into “hidden spaces of resistance” where they build a community and resist controls of the dominant cultures.

How can you use this literature review?

In policy and practice, we should move beyond the idea that migrant women are either “wife or worker”. Rather, this research highlights the fact that migrant women occupy multiple social locations as mothers, workers, daughters, sisters, and citizens. Immigration policies and advocacy groups should consider the diverse lived experience of migrant women as “workers”, and aim to strengthen their resistance strategies and agency instead of labeling them as victims.

Next steps and future research

By taking an integrative approach, the authors have illuminated underexplored areas of analysis that have the potential to advance understandings of women's migration as a whole. Particularly, future studies may explore how gendered ideologies and economic interests overlap or contradict with respect to marriage migration and domestic labour migration. There is also a need to investigate the various emerging forms of civil and political participation among women migrants in East and Southeast Asia, and to what extent their engagement in diverse fields of paid work is organized by local labour markets and legal systems.

----- About the authors -----

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