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Abstract

As a small labor-short … the Philippines, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka and amounting to one foreign maid to every eight households, Singapore provides a case study of a country where foreign maids are seen as an economic necessity but not without important social consequences and political ramifications. Beginning with a brief examination of state policy on transnational labor migration relating to female domestic workers, this article goes on to explore the debates within public discourse as well as private accounts on the impact of foreign maids on a range of issues, including female participation in the workforce; the social reproduction of everyday life including the delegation of the domestic burden and the upbringing of the young; the presence of “enclaves” of foreign nationals in public space; and bilateral relations between host and sending countries. It concludes that the transnational labor migration is a multifaceted phenomenon with important repercussions on all spheres of life, hence requiring dynamic policy intervention on the part of the authorities concerned.

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