

# HONG KONG: THE MOST ATTRACTIVE DESTINATION FOR FILIPINO WOMEN MIGRANT DOMESTIC WORKERS

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## Abstract

*The paper aims to explore and analyze patterns of outward migratory flows of Filipino women to Hong Kong for working as domestic worker. The data is taken from the official records of The Philippines Overseas Employment Administration for the period from 2001 to 2009. The paper explored the patterns of global, regional and country wise flows of Filipino women migrant domestic workers. The East Asian region seems to be the second most attractive region for these women domestic workers. But Hong Kong appears to be the most attractive destination for them on global and country wise analysis. Hong Kong receives an incomparable number of the women domestic workers from the Philippines (i.e. 86.5%) than any other country in East Asian region during the period studied. The Filipino women moving to Hong Kong comprises 21% to 48% of the total Filipino women migrant domestic workers leaving country to move all around the world. They make 6.8% of total Filipino labor migrants, 11% of total Filipino women labor migrants, 30% of total Filipino migrant domestic workers, and 31.4% of total Filipino women migrant domestic workers. In terms of the Filipino domestic workers moving to Hong Kong, these women comprise 98% of total Filipino migrant domestic workers of both gender moved to Hong Kong and 99.75% of the total Filipino women labor migrant heading to Hong Kong during the period of study. The data analysis shows that Hong Kong is the most attractive destination for Filipino women migrant domestic workers around the world.*

**Keywords:** *The Philippines, Women, Migrants, Domestic work, Hong Kong.*

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## **Introduction**

The changes in global economy led to changing patterns of women's migration. The growing participation of women in paid labor force outside home has led to a growing need of domestic work and the care of children and elderly left behind at home to be done by some one other. The shift of these responsibilities associated with women is not to men, but from one woman to another. In growing economies when women leave their home for jobs in paid labour market, still the local women are not available to provide their services in low wages. Migrant women domestic workers provide the most suitable human resource to give these services in low wage and by being available for long time throughout the day.

Asia has both labour sending and receiving countries. There are several countries that are sending their women to work as domestic workers throughout the globe. Most of the migrant women joining international labour market in Asian region come from South Asia and East Asia. The Philippine is one major labor sending country in Asian region. The Filipino women migrant domestic workers (FWMDW) are a large section of all Filipino labour migrants. Hong Kong is one important labour receiving point. Women domestic workers comprise a substantial part of the total labour force Hong Kong receives. Accordingly, the paper intends to explore patterns of Filipino women migrant domestic workers' movement to Hong Kong during the period from 2001 to 2009.

## **Review of Literature**

Asian labour migration has gained importance in the globalizing world (Chin & Asian Migration Centre, 2005: 7-8). According to an estimate, out of total 15 million migrants of Asian origin around the world, 10 million are employed in Asian countries (Chin & Asian Migration Centre, 2005: 7). It means the region has both the sending and receiving countries of international migrant labour (Siddiqui,

2008). The important labour sending countries of Asia are Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, India, and Bangladesh (Thimothy & Sasikumar, 2012; Siddiqui, 2008). They are mostly employed in wealthier countries of Asia (within Middle East and Far East Asia), Australia, New Zealand, and Countries in the Pacific (Thimothy & Sasikumar, 2012; Asian Migration Centre, 1999; Chin & Asian Migration Centre, 2005: 7; Smales, 2010: 11; Reuter, 2011: 8).

With the passage of time, women have started comprising a large number of these migrants. Smales (2010: 11) argues that women labour migrants are outnumbering than their men counterparts in East and Southeast Asia (Smales, 2010: 11). There were 1.4 million migrant women joining different work sectors in seven top labor importing countries of East Asia (i.e. Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Hong Kong SAR, Taiwan Province of China, the Republic of Korea and Japan) in 2002 (Yamanaka & Piper, 2005: 8).

The majority of Asian women migrant workers in international labor market come from three countries; the Philippines, Indonesia and Sri Lanka (Siddiqui, 2008; Piper, 2009). With rapid increase in women's labor force participation and involvement in economic activity outside home in developed and developing countries there has emerged a dire need for human resource to take care of their domestic work and household chores (Reuter, 2011: 8). The domestic work appearing as an industry is mostly employed by women; as up to 90% of domestic workers around the world are women (Smales, 2010: 11).

The same domestic work is also responsible for generating particular streams of female labour migration in the world (Smales, 2010: 11). It is estimated that the majority of the 4 million migrant domestic workers in Asia and 1.5 million domestic workers of Asian origin working outside Asia are women (Reuter, 2011: 8). These women domestic workers mostly coming from Indonesia,

Philippines, Thailand, Sri Lanka, India and Bangladesh are commonly employed in Malaysia, Hong Kong, Japan and Taiwan (Smales, 2010: 11; Reuter, 2011: 8).

Hong Kong is one such top migrant-importing country in Asia (Chin & Asian Migration Centre, 2005: 8). Main origin countries of migrant workers in Hong Kong (SAR) are also Indonesia, Philippines, and Thailand (Smales, 2010: 27; Chin & Asian Migration Centre, 2005). The migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong are officially called as Foreign Domestic Helpers (FDHs) referring to those migrant or foreign workers hired to carry out paid domestic help services in the territory (Chin & Asian Migration Centre, 2005: 1).

On the one hand, the history has shown an ever growing number of foreign domestic helpers in Hong Kong. On the other hand, Philippines had remained one of the largest FDHs sending country for Hong Kong. It started in 1970s when Hong Kong's economy started booming and requiring more labour force. Those traditionally out of paid labour work (e.g. women and senior citizens) were also inducted to fill this requirement. Consequently, a need to look after of the household behind these women emerged and led Hong Kong to adopt a liberal policy for importation of foreign domestic helpers (Chin & Asian Migration Centre, 2005: 9). There were 11,179 registered foreign domestic helpers in 1981 in Hong Kong. The number of FDHs in Hong Kong gradually grew along with a visible pattern showing a large percentage of Filipinos among them. Hong Kong had 45,154 FDHs in 1988 with 92.4% of them as Filipinos; 101,182 FDHs in 1992 with 88% Filipinos; 170,971 FDHs in 1997 with 81% Filipinos; and 216,790 FDHs in 2000 including 70% Filipinos (Chin & Asian Migration Centre, 2005: 9-10).

In 2001, Hong Kong SAR hosted more than 184,000 domestic workers including 70% from the Philippines (Yamanaka & Piper, 2005: 10). In the year 2008, it is reported that there were 232,781 FDHs working in Hong Kong (Mok, 2008: 104). By March 2010, the

number reached to 273,609 FDHs (Smales, 2010: 27-28). By 2011, it became around 300,000 domestic workers (around 9% of the population) in Hong Kong, the majority of them are from Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Nepal (Reuter, 2011: 8).

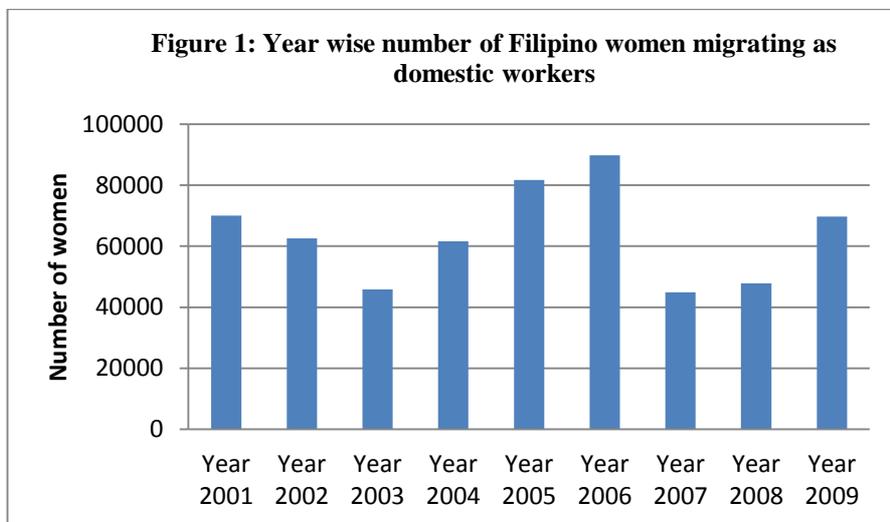
The Philippines is one major labor exporting country of East Asia. The extent of labor exports can be assessed by the fact that 7 million people (i.e. 9% of total population) of the country lives and works outside its territorial boundaries including more than 50% of them involved in temporary contract work (International Organization for Migration, 2005: 239). Women comprise more than half of the number of exported Filipino labor, majority of them joining labor market in different countries as domestic workers (Parreñas, 2001). It is visible that for last past few decades the Philippines has remained a major source of labour sending mostly as domestic workers throughout the world in general and to Hong Kong in Particular. This paper is an effort to trace the pattern of Filipino women migrant domestic workers movement towards Hong Kong during the years 2001-2009.

## **Method**

The paper intends to explore and analyze the patterns of Filipino women labor migrants leaving the country to join domestic work in Hong Kong during the year 2001 to 2009. The geographical scope of the study is limited to Hong Kong as a receiving country of Filipino women migrants. The time period it covers to analyze the Filipino women migration to Hong Kong is from the year 2001 to 2009. The data has been taken from secondary sources. The annual records of the Philippines Overseas Employment Administration for the above said period of study were used to analyze to show the numbers, percentages and proportions to identify the patterns of Filipino women migrant domestic workers moving towards Hong Kong. The data taken from the sources is analyzed and presented in the forms of graphs and charts to serve the end of this paper.

### Global Demand for Filipino Women Migrant Domestic Workers

The yearly demand of Filipino women domestic workers in international labor market is sufficiently large enough. Despite fluctuations in the number of women migrants every year, it remains constantly high. The data presented in graph in Figure 1 clearly shows a sufficiently large number of Filipino women migrants leaving the Philippines every year during 2001 to 2009 for employment as domestic workers in other countries. The number of Filipino women migrating for domestic work was highest (i.e. 89,819) in the year 2006. It is followed by 81,725 women in 2005, 70,052 women in 2001, and 69,669 in 2009.



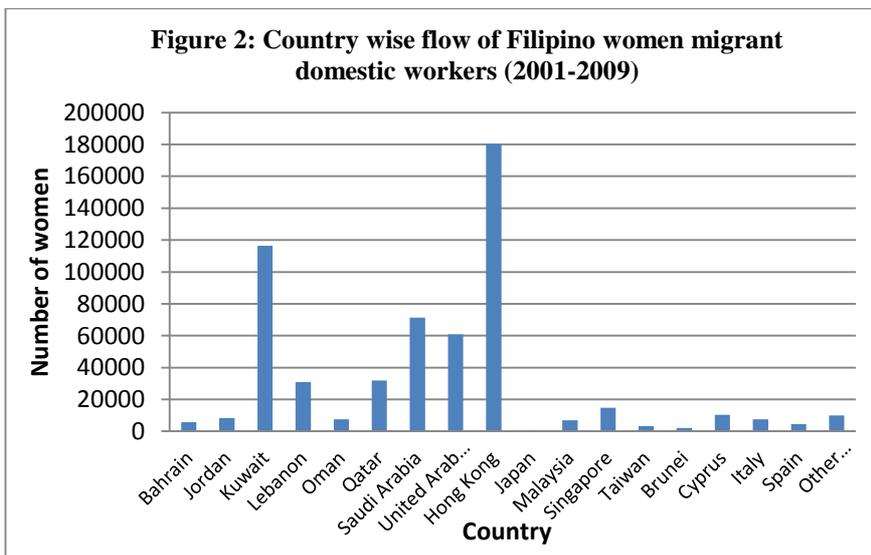
**Source:** Statistics taken from The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA, 2013)

The number of Filipino women migrant domestic workers joining global market was almost equal in 2002 and 2004 with 62,548 and 61,624 migrant women, respectively. The lowest number of women migrating from Philippines to join international labor market was

witnessed in three years; as 45,858 women in the year 2003, falling down to 44,903 women in the year 2007, and 47,840 women in the year 2008. In short, on average 63,782 women migrated from the Philippines as domestic workers every year during 2001-2009 to all around the world.

### Major Destinations for Filipino Women Migrant Domestic Workers

There are regional differences in the demand and supply of Filipino women migrant domestic workers. The data analysis, as presented in graph in Figure 2 shows top eighteen countries to which the highest numbers of Filipino women migrate as domestic workers. The data on the country wise differences in Filipino women migrant domestic workers' flow also gives an idea of regional differences of demand and supply during the period from 2001 to 2009. Three most important regions receiving large number of Filipino women domestic workers identified are Middle East Asia, East Asia, and Europe, respectively.



**Source:** Statistics taken from The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA, 2013)

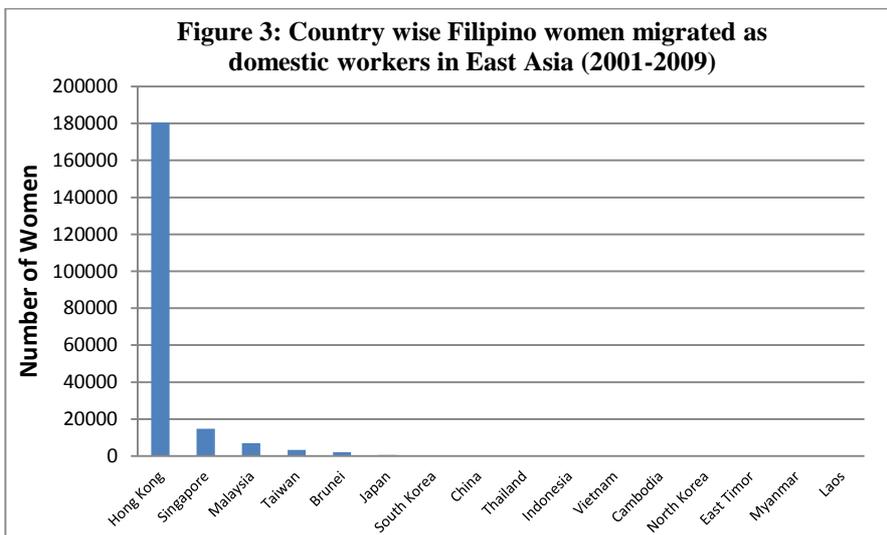
The most attractive destination region for Filipino women domestic workers lie in Middle East Asia. A large number of women domestic workers migrate to Arab countries e.g. Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates. The second most attractive region is East Asia including countries like Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, Japan, and Brunei. The third region for receiving a large number of Filipino women domestic workers is Europe including countries like Cyprus, Spain, and Italy.

Country wise analysis of Filipino women migrant domestic workers' flow during 2001 to 2009 show that the most important destination countries for them are Hong Kong (attracting 180,378 women), Kuwait (116,472 women), Saudi Arabia (71,357 women), United Arab Emirates (60,932 women), Qatar (31,914 women), Lebanon (30,983 women), Singapore (14,818 women), Cyprus (10,343 women), Italy (7,637 women), Oman (7,496 women), Malaysia (6,979 women), Spain (4,578 women), and Taiwan (3,275 women). The largest number of Filipino women domestic workers migrated to Hong Kong. It is followed by Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Lebanon, and Singapore. While Bahrain, Jordan, Oman, Japan, Malaysia, Taiwan, Brunei, Cyprus, Italy, and Spain attract relatively less number of Filipino women migrant domestic workers. The rest of the countries around the world attract only 2% of the total Filipino women migrant domestic workers.

### **Migration of Filipino Women as Domestic Workers within East & South East Asia**

Following the oil based economies of the Arab countries in Middle East Asia, East Asian region appears to be the second largest labour market for Filipino women migrant domestic workers. The most important destinations for Filipino women labour migrant in East Asian region are Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan, Brunei, and Japan. While they also move to other countries of the region e.g.

South Korea, China, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia, North Korea, and East Timor in less numbers. Still Hong Kong appears to receive the largest number of Filipino women migrant domestic workers as compared to any other country around the world. It also absorbs most of the Filipino women migrating to the countries in East Asian region as domestic workers.

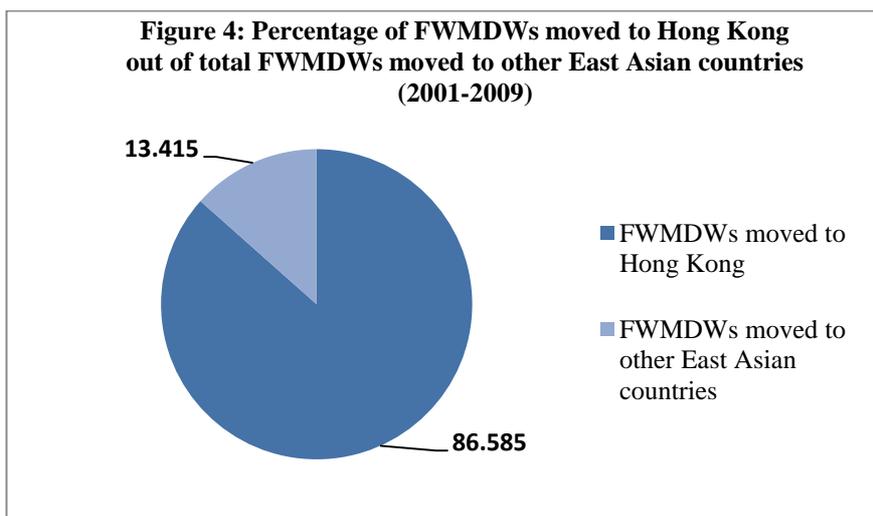


**Source:** Statistics taken from The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA, 2013)

Figure 2 gives a pictorial representation to show a wide difference in the proportion of the Filipino women migrant domestic workers moving to work in Hong Kong as compared to any other country. Similarly, the above presented graph in Figure 3 is showing the difference in the highest number of Filipino women migrant domestic workers moving to Hong Kong as compared to the marginal number of them migrating to join domestic work in any other East Asian and South East Asian country.

It is observed that the highest number of FWMDW (i.e. 180,567 women) moved to Hong Kong. It is followed by Singapore with

14,831 women, Malaysia with 6,991 women, Taiwan with 3,279 women, Brunei with 2109 women, Japan with 568 women, South Korea with 144 women, and China with only 32 women during the period studied here. Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia, North Korea, and East Timor hosted less than 10 Filipino women domestic workers each during the period of study. Myanmar and Laos did not even receive any single legally migrating Filipino domestic worker.



**Source:** Statistics taken from The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA, 2013)

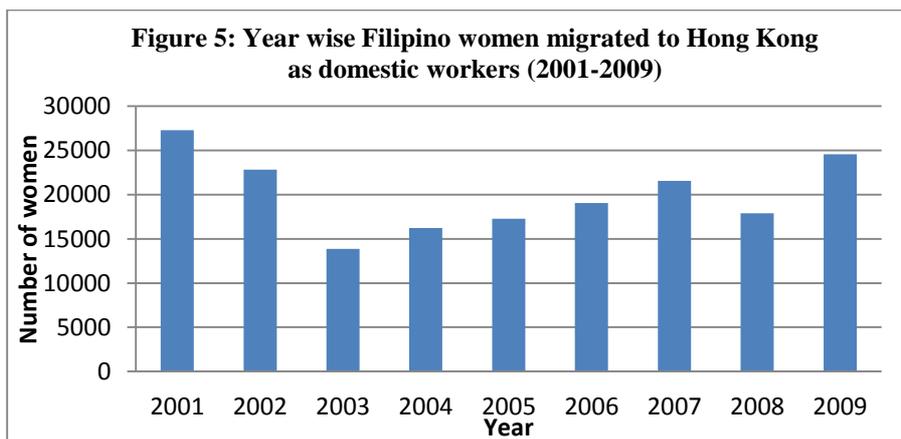
The data analysis presented in pie chart as Figure 4 clearly portray this wide difference of number of Filipino women domestic workers migrating to Hong Kong and other East Asian countries. The Filipino women migrant domestic workers heading to Hong Kong during 2001-2009 comprise 86.58% (i.e. 180567 out of 208543 women domestic workers migrating to 16 East Asian countries) of the total women migrant domestic workers moving to other countries of East Asia. It shows that Filipino women domestic workers find a more acceptable and congenial conditions in Hong Kong to migrate and

work. In next sub section a detailed discussion is done to explain the patterns of migration of these domestic workers to Hong Kong during 2001 to 2009.

### Migration of Filipino Women Domestic Workers to Hong Kong

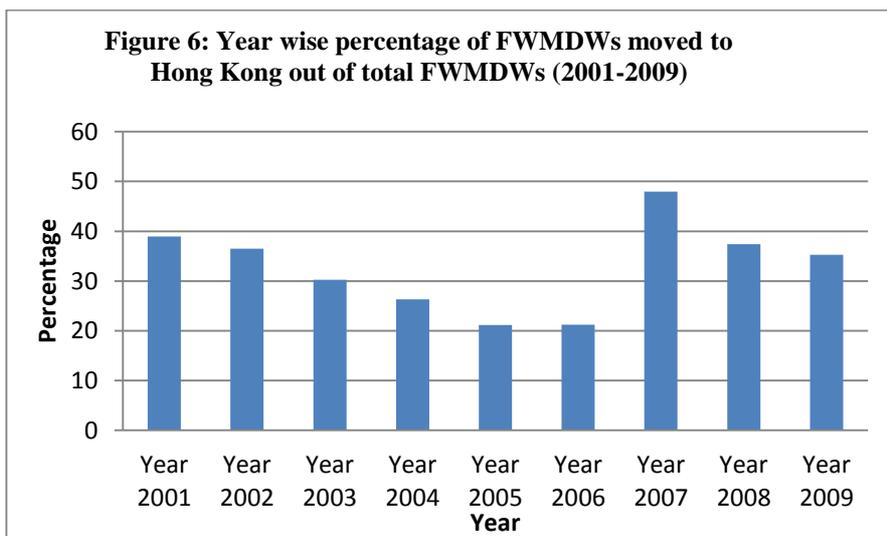
Hong Kong is the country that attracts the largest number of Filipino women domestic workers around the world. In East Asian region, Hong Kong appears to be the one country attracting most of the Filipino women migrant domestic workers. During the period from 2001 to 2009 total 180,567 Filipino women migrated to join domestic work in Hong Kong.

The year wise data analysis of number of Filipino women migrant domestic workers shows that the number of women migrating to Hong Kong as domestic workers remained high throughout the period from 2001 to 2009. The highest number of Filipino women domestic workers migrated to Hong Kong during 2001 (i.e. 27,303 women). It is followed by the year 2009 when 24,567 women domestic workers and in 2002 when 22,827 women domestic workers migrated to Hong Kong. During 2003 to 2008, the number remained between 13,858 to 21,552 women domestic workers.



Source: Statistics taken from The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA, 2013)

As we come to know about the year wise total number of FWMDW leaving the country (in Figure 1) and the year wise total number of FWMDW moving to Hong Kong (in Figure 5). It is easy as well as interesting to calculate year wise proportion of FWMDW moving to Hong Kong out of total FWMDW leaving the country during the same year. The data analysis as presented in Figure 6 shows the same. It is a graphical representation of the year wise percentage of FWMDWs moved to Hong Kong out of total FWMDW leaving Philippines for the first time to join domestic work around the world during these years.



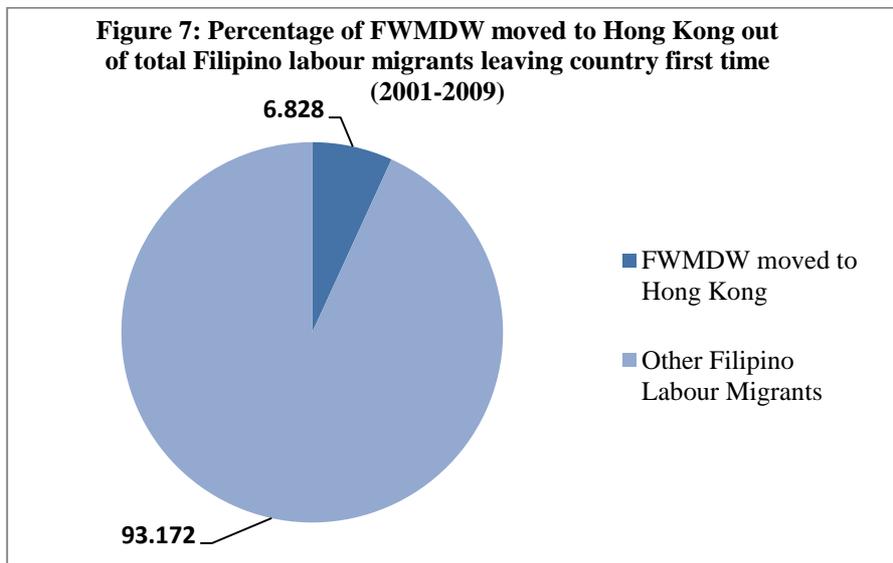
**Source:** Statistics taken from The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA, 2013)

The graph 5 shows that around 21% to 48% of total Filipino women migrant domestic workers moved to join domestic work in Hong Kong during 2001 to 2009. The year 2007 witnessed the largest proportion (i.e. 48%) of the total Filipino women leaving country for joining domestic work only headed towards one country that is Hong Kong. In the year 2001, 39% of total FWMDW went to Hong Kong. The same pattern continued in the following years as: 37% in

2008, 36.4% in 2002, 35 % in 2009, and 30% in 2003. The least number of Filipino women migrant domestic workers moved to Hong Kong in the years 2004, 2005 and 2006 as 26%, 21%, and 21.2%, respectively.

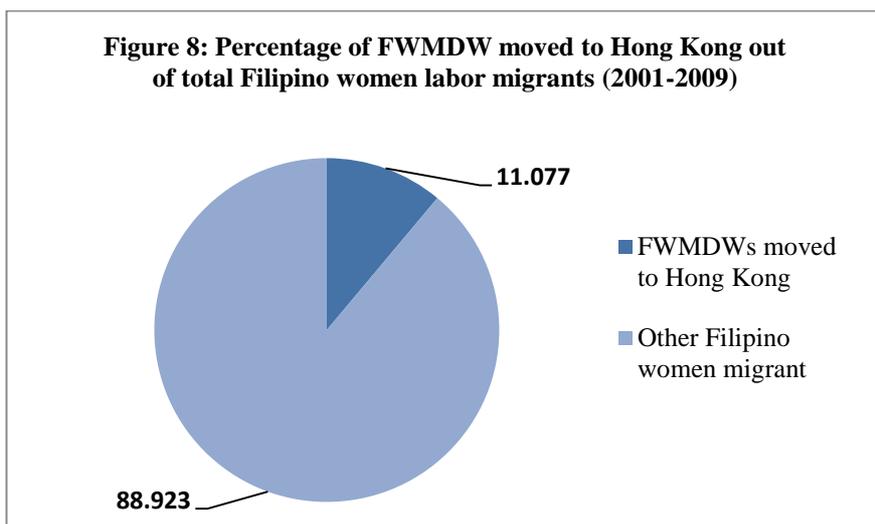
### Proportion of Filipino Women Domestic Workers Migrating to Hong Kong

Data analysis shows that Filipino women migrant domestic workers moving to Hong Kong comprise a large percentage of the total male and female Filipino labor migrants moving to all around the world for joining different work categories. It is shown in Figure 7 that the Filipino women migrant domestic worker moving to Hong Kong comprise 6.8% (18,0567 out of 2,644,346 persons) of the total Filipino men and women migrated to join different work sectors in different countries of the world during the period from 2001-2009.



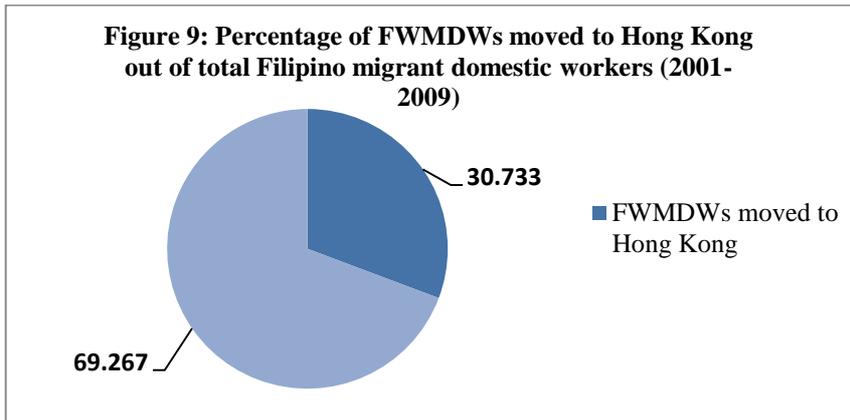
**Source:** Statistics taken from The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA, 2013)

Further data analysis also shows that FWMDW moving to Hong Kong also comprises a sufficiently large proportion of total women migrants leaving the Philippines as first time hire during the period studied here. The Figure 8 shows that Filipino women migrant domestic workers migrating to Hong Kong comprise 11% (180,567 out of 1,630,015 women) of the total women migrants leaving Philippine during the period studied for joining various work categories in different regions and countries.



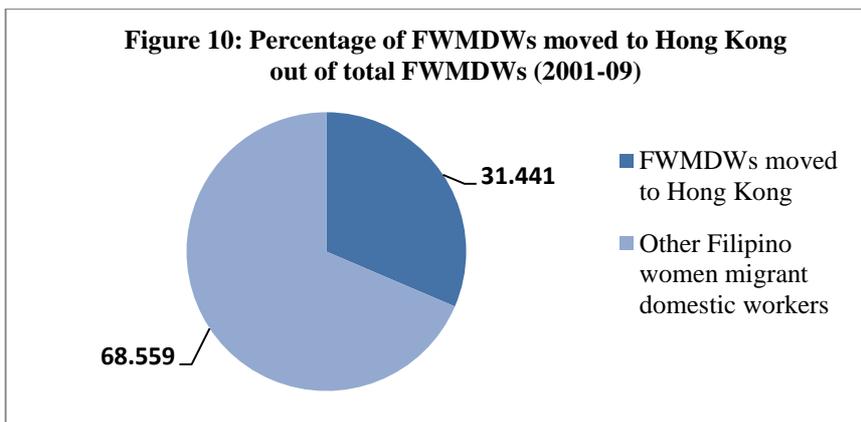
**Source:** Statistics taken from The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA, 2013)

It is also visible that almost one third of total domestic workers leaving Philippines are heading towards Hong Kong. The data analysis shown in Figure 9 illustrates that the Filipino women domestic workers leaving for Hong Kong during 2001-2009 comprise 30.73% (i.e. 180,567 out of 587,533 migrant domestic workers) of the total male and female migrant domestic workers leaving Philippines to join domestic work in different regions and countries of the world in this period.



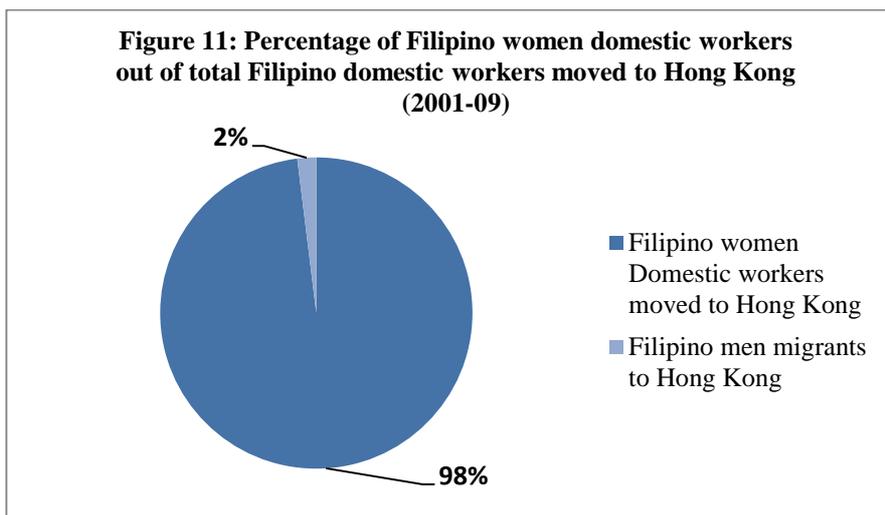
**Source:** Statistics taken from The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA, 2013)

At the same time Filipino women migrant domestic workers heading towards Hong Kong are a sufficiently large group to form one third of the total Filipino women migrant domestic workers migrating to different countries around the world during the period from 2001 to 2009. The Figure 10 shows that these women comprises 31.44% (i.e. 180,567 out of 574,289 Filipino migrant women domestic workers) of total Filipino women migrant domestic workers moving to different countries around the world.



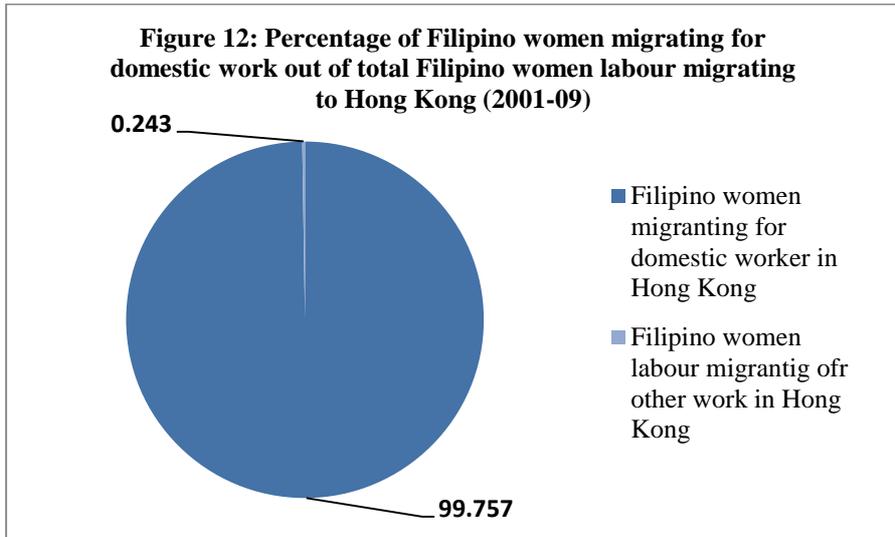
**Source:** Statistics taken from The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA, 2013)

The data presented in Figure 9 and Figure 10 shows that there is small difference in the number of total Filipino male and female migrant domestic workers moving all around the world and the total number of Filipino women migrant domestic workers leaving Philippines. The reason behind this small difference in number is that women are the dominant group in the domestic work industry. Most of the women labor migrants from Philippines are segregated in this sector (Tabassum, Tabassum & Afzal 2013).



**Source:** Statistics taken from The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA, 2013)

The same pattern of gender composition is true for the Filipino migrant domestic workers moving to Hong Kong. The data analysis presented in Figure 11 show that Filipino women comprise 98% (i.e. 180,567 out of 184,163 of total Filipinos migrating to Hong Kong) of total Filipino migrant domestic workers moving to Hong Kong during this period.



**Source:** Statistics taken from The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA, 2013)

Last but not the least, the data analysis, presented in pie chart as Figure 12, shows that Filipino women mostly migrate to Hong Kong for joining labor market as domestic workers with only few exceptions attracted to some other sorts of work. The Filipino women domestic workers heading to Hong Kong comprises 99.75% (i.e. 180,567 out of 181,006 Filipino women migrants moving to Hong Kong) of the total Filipino women migrant labor moving to Hong Kong for joining different work sectors during the period studies in this paper.

## Conclusion

The paper intends to explore and analyze the case of Hong Kong as a most attractive destination in the world for Filipino women migrant domestic workers during the period from 2001 to 2009. The argument has been established on the basis of the patterns of Filipino women migrating to join domestic work in Hong Kong. The patterns have been identified by calculating numbers, percentages

or proportions of the Filipino women leaving country for the first time to join domestic work in Hong Kong from the official records of Philippines Overseas Employment Administration for the period from 2001 to 2009.

First, an effort is made to provide global, regional, and country wise analysis of the number of Filipino women domestic workers migrating around the world. On global level, it is found that the number of women migrant domestic workers leaving Philippines for first time ranges from highest 89,819 women in the year 2006 to the lowest as 44,903 women in 2007. On average more than 63000 women were leaving the country to join domestic work around the world. On regional level, the data analysis identified Middle East Asia, East Asia and Europe as top three most attractive regions in this regard. The country wise analysis shows that Hong Kong with 180,378 Filipino women migrant domestic workers during 2001 to 2009 appeared as the most attractive destination for Filipino women migrant domestic workers.

Second, a detailed analysis of East Asian region and different countries within it also shows an incomparable difference between the numbers of FWMDWs received in Hong Kong and in all other countries of the region. It is found that 86.58% of the total Filipino Women Migrant Domestic Workers moving to different countries of East Asian region were heading towards Hong Kong as compared to only 13.41 % to other countries of the region.

Third, the data analysis focused on Hong Kong that has been established as the most attractive destination for Filipino women migrant domestic workers not only in East Asia but in the whole world. The year wise data analysis shows that the number of FWMDW moving to Hong Kong ranges between the highest as 27,303 women in 2001 to lowest as 13,858 women in the year 2003. These women comprised a large proportion of the total FWMDW leaving country each year. The proportion ranges from the highest

as 48% in the year 2007 to the lowest as 21% in the year 2005.

Further data analysis highlighted that FWMDW moving to Hong Kong made 6.82% of the total Filipino labor migrants leaving country during 2001-2009. These women comprise 11% of total number of Filipino women labor migrants moving out of the country during this period. They comprised 30.73% of the total male and female migrant domestic workers moving around the world. They are 31.44% of total Filipino Women Migrant Domestic Workers moving around the world during this period. They are the large majority (i.e. 98%) of total male and female Filipino migrant domestic workers moved to Hong Kong. It comprises 99.75% of the total Filipino women labor migrants moving to Hong Kong to join various sectors of work during this period.

It can be concluded that Hong Kong is the most attractive destination for Filipino Women Migrant Domestic Workers around the world. Almost one third of the total Filipino women migrant domestic workers during the period between the year 2001 to 2009 moved to this one place. All the Filipino women migrating to Hong Kong during this period are most likely to join the same work with only very few exceptions employed in other work sectors.

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