

# **Women and International Migration: Background of the Feminization of Migration and its Implications**

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## **Abstract**

Migration is a complex worldwide Phenomena. With the emergence of new threats such as international terrorism, drug problems, international crime, international human trafficking, etc., the issue of migration is deemed a serious threat to the security of individuals and societies. Although migration patterns, processes, and the experiences of migrants are gendered, the research trend of analyzing the issue of migration from a gender viewpoint became active only in the 1980s.

The paper shows three basic themes, by examining the issue of migration from a gender viewpoint and the international political meaning by clarifying the background and social consequences of the migration of women. To make such content more systematic, this paper will first analyze the relationship between the social change termed globalization and the feminization of migration, and discuss the structural background of the feminization of migration and the socioeconomic marginalization of the migrant women.

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## **Key words**

international migration, feminization of migration, marginalization of migrant women, forms of migrant women

## **Introduction**

Migration is a multilateral and complex global issue. The radical increase in the movement of global population exerts an influence on the political and financial situation of the regions and nations concerned, thus bringing about the expansion of social heterogeneity caused by the diverse cultures and races, which in turn gives rise to disputes of cultural identity. With the emergence of such new threats as international terrorism, drug problems, international crime, international human

trafficking, etc., the issue of migration is deemed a serious threat to the security of individuals and societies, and has induced many disputes related to intra-regional security issues including the problems of national sovereignty and autonomy (Butterwegge, 2004, p. 175).

Taking into consideration the situation of population statistics in consequence to low birth rate and aging, the necessary skilled foreign workforce needs to be brought in continuously (Castels, 2004). Thereupon, each nation is concentrating its efforts on preventing the several social problems arising from the increase in immigration and actively responding to social and security situations caused thereby. To satisfy the demands for a systematization of immigration policy and effective management mechanism, nations have strengthened legal stipulations related to immigration to control legitimate immigration, and so immigration is becoming more difficult as time goes on.

At the same time, in regard to illegal immigration, which does not follow the legitimate entry procedure but is effected in stealth or through immigration agencies or illegal channels, governments are carrying out policies of strongly regulating them through borderline controls and management systems. In addition, many refugees have been generated due to the political instability and racial and religious conflicts as well as an increase in economic uncertainty in Asia and Africa, and so nations are trying to deal with exiles and other refugee-related issues in conjunction with each other based on cooperation with the global society from a humanitarian dimension.

As can be seen, the problem of international migration as a global issue connotes a very comprehensive meaning not only simply as an international movement of workforces but also as a factor that influences the financial policies and social policies of nations. Hereupon, of late, studies related to migration are actively being carried out. In spite of this, the research trend of analyzing the issue of migration from a gender viewpoint became active only in the 1980s when the migration of women became conspicuous.<sup>1</sup> The reason women were not considered when dealing with the issue of migration was that in researching migration, not only was the migration of women not deemed as an important part of the research theme taking up much priority, but also it was marginalized

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<sup>1</sup> There are a number of studies devoted to gender and migration, see Ahtias and Lazaridis (2000); Willis and Yeoh (2000); Kofman (2001); Morokvasic (2003).

from social discussions.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, not enough studies were conducted in regard to those problems that only women especially experience in the process of migration, such as why they migrate, where they migrate to, and how they adjust to a new society. Such a trend is in line with the extension of the supply of the lower-priced and more effective women workforce following the expansion of the service field in the industrial sector and the change of the global economic structure in the process of converting industrial societies to knowledge-based societies. Moreover, the financial and sociocultural situations of those nations accepting the inflow of workforces and those discharging them have come together to accelerate the feminization of migration on a worldwide basis, and as a result has caused the socioeconomic marginalization of the migrant women (Arya & Roy, 2006, pp. 10-11).

The basic themes of this paper are: 1) the viewpoint of 'gender' is becoming a central principle in international migration; 2) in most societies the 'patriarchal social structure' directly and indirectly influences the process of migration; and 3) the traditional view that womanhood and the patriarchal sex morals are playing a decisive role in migration in relation to the fact that new workforces of migrant women are being accepted in fields of domestic labor and low-waged labor, and in particular in the fields of entertainment and sexual industry. Based on these points, this paper will examine the issue of migration from a gender viewpoint, and try to contemplate its international political meaning by clarifying the background and social consequences of the migration of women. To do so, this paper will first analyze the relationship between the social change termed globalization and the feminization of migration, and discuss the structural background of the feminization of migration and the socioeconomic marginalization of migrant women.

## **Globalization and the Feminization of Migration**

### **Feminization of Migration and Increase in Illegal Migration**

In the process of the world becoming one global society through the

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<sup>2</sup> For the details, please see the studies: Buijss (1993); Boyle and Halfacree (1999); Hahn (2000); Han (2003).

strengthening of political and financial network, migration across national borderlines is one of the inevitable global phenomena. The reason for the phenomenon of mass migration can be pointed out as the fact that globalization is being accelerated resulting from the radical development of information and communication technology and the increase in exchanges and cooperation between countries as the world is quickly being integrated into one financial bloc. According to the convention of the UN that protects the rights of migrant workers and members of their families, international migrants is defined as “persons who, having been continuously present in the country of origin for more than a year, leave it to remain in the country of destination for more than a year.”<sup>3</sup> “Migrant Women” refers to women who face migration including diverse movements in a geopolitical space caused by changes in the basis of living and continuous changes in residences caused thereof.

Castles and Miller sees the major trend in recent international migration as the globalization of migration, differentiation of migration, acceleration of migration, and feminization of migration (Castles & Miller, 1998). Of these, feminization of migration (Kofman, 2001, pp. 64-65; Morokvasic, 2003, pp. 9-22) is one of the important keywords in understanding the recent traits of migration, representing the situation of gendered migration and sexual discrimination. As the movement of the global population has become more active in consequence of globalization, the ratio of women staying more than a year as migrants is growing. According to the World Migration Report 2003 of the International Organization for Migration, in 2000, out of a world population of 6057 million, the number of international migrants numbered 175 million (approx. 2.5%), out of which the number of migrant women was 85 million or the 48.8% of the total number of migrants (International Organization for Migration, 2003, p. 5).

In this process, the feminization of migration represents the fact that the number of women migrant workers is increasing rapidly as the financial povertization of women is being accelerated. Moreover, many women are crossing borders to work in such fields of care-taking such as housework, nursing, and child-care, which are considered as typical women’s work. This is because migrant women are affected not only by

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<sup>3</sup> Retrieved April 30, 2007, from [http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/site/myjahiasite/shared/shared/mainsite/published\\_docs/books/wmr2003/chap16p291\\_302.pdf](http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/site/myjahiasite/shared/shared/mainsite/published_docs/books/wmr2003/chap16p291_302.pdf)

the economic and social environment of the countries they are from but also by the policies of the host countries related to the conditions of the labor market and immigration. Furthermore, the increase in migrant women based on the unbalanced economic development between nations and regions is intertwined and complexing the relationships of gender, status and race (Castles & Millers, 2003; Anthias & Lazaridis, 2000).

The character of the migration of females also represents the character of migration in general, which is changing from labor migration of the past to permanent migration, from financial migration to social migration, and from temporary migration mainly of single people to permanent migration in the units of families for permanent settlement. Hereupon arises the need to analyze the migration of women as an independent field separate from the migration of men (Kofman, 2001, pp. 17-18). This is the reason that makes us focus on the fact that, whereas before the migrant women were considered merely as members of the family or companions and their place of migration, status of stay, duration of stay, etc., were determined according to the gender relationship formed thereof, now they are considered as independent entities and that they migrate in a way different from men (Kofman, 2001, p. 194).

Along with the feminization of migration, the increase in illegal immigration is another trait of the international immigration phenomena of recent times. Each country is concentrating its efforts on preparing a systematic immigration policy as well as legal and regulative means to control and manage immigration through the enactment and amendment of related laws and readjustment of related policies. Moreover, after the incident of September 11th 2001, channels of legalistic migration have been reduced as an after effect of the war against terrorism, drugs and international crimes like human trafficking, and a tendency of relying on immigration through illegal channels is visibly increasing.

As can be seen, in the process of strengthening the control over the inflow of foreigners on a national level, unlike men, in the case of women there are many cases where the migrants cannot satisfy the necessary conditions necessary for migration, so a great number of migrant women are exposed to immigration through routes that are not legal or unlawful, or illegal immigration in general. Therefore, it is common to find migrant women connected to crime organizations dealing with human trafficking or sex trafficking (Kofman, 2001, p. 122; Anthias & Lazaridis, 2000). In

this process, migrant women are subject to special forms of discrimination and violation of rights.

As a result of the gender separation of international labor, in the increase in the migration of women from third world countries to advanced nations, women take up work in the manufacturing industry with low wages and long working hours, according to their traditional gender role. Migrant women engaged in simple labor and in the status of temporary stay are subject to unstable and inferior working conditions and discrimination because of the nature of their work (Han, 2003, p. 57).

In addition, when we take into account the fact that most women who have moved to North America, the Middle East nations and European nations are migrating there as domestic help to fill in the vacancies in domestic labor resulting from the increased financial activities of the women of these countries, as instruments of sexuality, or as workers in jobs specialized for women, and are providing labor of reproduction to satisfy the demands of these countries, we can see that the migrant women face discrimination and exclusion two or threefold (Kim, 2005, pp. 32-33).

Thus, what becomes important is the necessity to deal with the issue of the migration of women in the time of globalization independently from a gender viewpoint, and not as a part of the migration of men as their spouses or subordinate members of family. Therefore, the next part of the paper discusses the forms of the migration of women from the standpoint that gender is an important factor organizing the international migration of workforces in a particular way.

### **Forms of Migration of Women**

The migration of women can be explained based on several diverse political, economic and social backgrounds. Women migrate not only to get employment for better living financially and for the survival of their families, but also to satisfy their desire for a new life, a greater freedom and a sense of achievements. The migration of women may take the following forms: a) voluntary immigration (ex: labor immigration) or enforced immigration (refuge, fleeing from oppression, etc.); b) immigration due to financial poverty or professional immigration; c) domestic immigration or international or interregional immigration; and

d) temporary immigration or permanent immigration (Han, 2003, pp. 26, 41).

The migration of women can be generally divided into the following forms of immigration: the reunion of family, marriage immigration through international marriage, immigration of labor, and immigration by applying for the status of refugee or exile.

First, the case of the reunion of family is the most dominant form of women's migration, for in the case of international labor immigration, the immigration of a married spouse and children is allowed for the union of a family. This form of immigration is allowed when a member of the family has stayed for a certain duration of time, has an independent place of living, and has an independent capability to earn a living without getting financial support from the immigrations' office. However, the plans to supplement the personnel of the workforces of the past have been stopped, and the selective immigration in accordance with the demands of the labor market is being strengthened, and the conditions for immigration for the reunion of family are becoming more and more complicated.

Second, the case of international marriage among the causes of the feminization of migration, and migrants through marriage are influenced manifold by gender, globalization and the migration phenomenon. As the bread-winner of a family, the move from a less developed nation to a relatively advanced nation through the feminization of international marriage is a form of migration that women suffering from extreme poverty and unemployment may choose to improve the financial situation of their families and themselves. In a situation where labor immigration through employment is difficult, marriage immigration, which can be done at a rather lower expense, is being actively carried out through international marriage brokers and agents in conjunction with friendly government policies of sending countries.

Third, labor immigration is migration through getting employment, and is related to the conditions and situation of the labor market of the migration country. Due to the changes in the industrial structure from simple to technology-intensive work, most countries are adopting active responsive strategies to attract highly skilled and educated professional manpower with knowledge and information, affecting policies to achieve this end. On the other hand, the immigration of low-waged and unskilled laborers, exiles and refugees, and migration for the reunion of

family, which all pose a burden on the welfare system and the society, are becoming more restricted and controlled. Such a tendency of selective immigration causes the migration of women to become more difficult, and exposes them to “exclusion” and “invisibility” as the minority of minorities.

Fourth, the case of refugees is emerging as a new problem in immigration due to the changes taking place in the international environment, namely the ending of the cold war in the late 1980s, and the mass entry of political exiles and refugees arising thereof. In 2006, it was deemed that there are 9.9 million refugees worldwide,<sup>4</sup> and the ratio of women refugees was on the rise. Refugees refer to people who are currently not in their native countries, and who cannot return to their native countries on account of racial, religious or political reasons; All nations recognize refugees and humanitarian exiles based on the Protocol Relation to the Status of Refugees of 1967 and the United Nations Convention Relation to the Status of Refugees of 1951, which is an international regime in relation to the protection of refugees. Due to the rapid increase of domestic wars and situations of armed conflicts after the ending of the cold war, many problems threatening the security of women are cropping up. The ratio of women among refugees increases constantly. In this process, in the cases where the internationally permitted applications as refugees or exiles are rejected and they are not recognized as refugees, there are many instances where the women who have entered in the status of refugees are degraded to the status of illegal immigrants, which becomes a serious threat to the security of women.

## **Structural Background of the Feminization of Migration and the Marginalization of Migrant Women**

### **Structural Background of the Feminization of Migration**

As seen above, women migrate for diverse purposes, and their ways of migration differ as well. In spite of this, if we are to explain the increasing migration of women through the keyword of the feminization of migration, we find that it has the following structural background.

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<sup>4</sup> UNHCR, *Statistical Yearbook 2006*. Retrieved June 5, 2008, from <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendoc.pdf?id=478ce0532&tbl=STATISTICS>



First, it is originated from the feminization of poverty arising from the unbalanced economic development of nations and unequal structures of economy in the globalized capitalistic system (Goldberg & Kremen, 1990, pp. 40-45; Hawthorn, 2004). The international movement of manpower on a massive scale is a core factor in the economic integration on a worldwide level, and the globalization of neo-liberalism has aggravated the poverty of peoples and nations through the flexibility of labor and caused the poverty of women in lesser-developed nations by consolidating with sexual discriminative ideology. In the case of lesser-developed countries where the imbalance of income is severe, the skilled workers are guaranteed relatively high wages, whereas the less skilled workers suffer from low-wages. Therefore, the less skilled workers who are not content with the low wages, below the minimum wage decide to immigrate. Thereupon, in the case of developing nations, they encourage labor immigration for the development of the nations for the positive factor of the matter, which is that the immigrants contribute towards economic development of their native countries by acquiring and sending foreign currency to them.

Second, in the process of entering the world economy, migration is often not the choice of the women themselves but is rather influenced by the gender relationship within the family. Unlike the migration of men, in the case of the migration of women the demand for their work is persistently continued. Therefore, differently from the immigration pattern of the past where it was mainly the men who migrated, now the international migration of women workforce is becoming active. Thus, as a structural background of the feminization of migration, the fact that immigration is being used as a strategic means of escaping from household poverty can be pointed out. In the process of the women carrying out their duties as the bread-winners of their families, the migration of women is affected by the changes taking place in the relationships in the division of labor resulting from changes in the rank structure among family members and economic structure as well as the restructuring of forms of families. This in turn results in the feminization of migration (Han, 2003, p. 77).

Third, changes in the industrial structure makes women workforce in the service industry necessary. As the low-waged labor market expands along with the flexibility of labor and the service industry grows in the migration countries, the demand for the migration of women working in

this field has increased. In this process, women migrate as domestic help, sexual service provider, entertainer or prostitute, or through commercialized marriage. In Asia for instance, women employed in the service industry including housekeeping and entertainment form the mainstream of migrant women, and the rise in the number of migrants through marriage also acts as a cause for propelling the feminization of migration (Yamanaka, 2003).

Fourth, migration based on sexuality as a medium is on the rise. Feminists point out that, as the migration of women increases rapidly, gender plays a major role in the international migration of work forces. Most of them, the migrant women in Asia, are engaged in sexual industry or domestic labor, in a marginal position since they are low-waged, part-time workers. As the instability of employment increases, there are more cases of migrant women being excluded and eliminated from the full-time labor market as opposed to men. Therefore, many cases of labor immigration participated by women involve the productivity of their bodies and sex, and in this process there are even cases where the national control in relation to the sexuality of women are justified.

### **Deepening of the Socioeconomic Marginalization of the Migrant Women**

The structural background of the feminization of migration mentioned above is a very important theme in connection to the problem of the socioeconomic marginalization of migrant women (Arya & Roy, 2006). The feminization of migration arising from the rapidly increasing international migration entails the process of the feminization of the workforce and expands the gap between the wages of both sexes and the division of jobs between sexes on a national level to the global level, and thus causes the marginalization of women work forces in the global labor market.

The cause for the positioning of the migrant women in the margins of female labor is, on the first level, the demands within the labor market based on globalization and the gender division of labor existing therein. Migrant women take the vacancies of the women of migration countries who are engaged in their own financial activities, or are engaged in worthless or unproductive labor in the low-waged labor market categorized as “other services industry” (Han, 2003, p. 147).

Of course, the increase in the migration of female does not directly cause the socioeconomic marginalization of women. However, the migration of women takes place with a different background and purpose from that of men; In this process the phenomenon of international gender division of labor in combination with the sexually discriminative ideology is reflected on the global labor market, and thus deepens the poverty of the women of lesser-developed nations. As has been pointed out, many migrant women provide labor of reproduction according to the demands of the migration countries, and this form of labor creates instability and becomes a cause for the marginalization of women labor.

The core of what makes the manpower system and the flexibility of labor possible is the irregularization of the employment structure of migrant women. In other words, in the unofficial fields, the exploitation of migrant women is increased and the marginalization of women is focused on unskilled and low-waged labor. Apart from the overall instability of the employment structure, the status of stay for migrant women is also unstable, and so in many cases they are not subject to social safety nets. Therefore, the social and economic marginalization is a cause for the deepening of the feminization of migration at the same time the feminization of migration results in the acceleration of the marginalization of the migrant women.

The marginalization of migrant women is even more serious in the case of women exposed to sexual industry and human trafficking. There is a high possibility that women who are marginalized in the labor market may go into low-waged labor market or the physical market of sex trafficking when they choose foreign labor immigration. Kathleen Barry observed that the sexuality of women were organized in different ways socially based on each historical period and economic basis, from the commercialization of sex under the marriage feudal system to normalized prostitution, and that it adopts forms that conform with the patriarchal conditions specific to each society through social norms and values (Barry, 1995, pp. 39-40). In this process, the sexuality of women is reproduced as a transnational factor crossing borders of nation states and being commercialized as exchangeable products.

In the matter of human trafficking including sex trafficking, over-the-border human trafficking is developed in a more complex and sophisticated way through a transnational network connected to international crime organizations. Such transnational human trafficking is

considered illegal, and women who are trafficked thus are seen as criminals who have crossed the border in an illegal way. Hereupon, human trafficking should not be dealt with as illegal immigration but rather as a special circumstance caused by gender difference. This is because in the case of migration in the character of human trafficking, women are commercialized and degraded to victims of prostitution and human trafficking, and so it should be seen as a threat to the basic rights of human beings. Therefore, a close interest in the violation of human rights in the route and course of migration is necessary, and a systematic framework of policies to protect these women's rights should be prepared (Walby, 2000, pp. 21-22).

Dissimilarly to the liberalization of trade and co-dependence through globalization, nation states are regulating the scale and form of immigration according to the demands of the economy and society, and a tendency of selective immigration following the necessity of the labor market is being strengthened. As legal migration is restricted and regulations related to immigration into nations are strengthened more and more, illegal migration will only increase, meaning that many women will be subjected to risks of inequality, violation of rights and exploitation related to gender.

The most fundamental cause of the migration of female is poverty. However, what is important in the marginalization of women deepened through their migration is to reconstruct the invisible arguments and knowledge surrounding the migration of female. Dealing with and visualizing the migration of women independently makes it clear that there is a difference in the basis of authority that works on international immigration according to gender. Therefore, efforts should be made to analyze the several social and economic problems arising from the marginalized position of migrant women from women's viewpoint and to resolve the problems of migrant women through the work of visualizing women. What is required are diverse explanations in regard to the cause and background of the migration of women, their methods of migration and their experiences in migration, together with an analysis on the migration of women as an independent field of study. Such study should be carried out focusing on the following three parts, namely: 1) exploitation of migrants in the field of unofficial and private domestic labor; 2) concentration in the field of low-waged and unskilled labor; and 3) migrants' subjection to human trafficking.

## Conclusion

After looking into the structural background of the feminization of migration, the fact of the matter is that, although the violation of human rights and exploitation of women are becoming more serious due to their marginal position, migration policies reflecting the experiences and understanding of migrant women are inadequate not only on the national level but also on the international level.

As a result, it has been clarified that, if globalization can be said to deepen the poverty of women and that poverty is a fundamental cause for the migration of female, then the feminization of migration deepens the polarization and classification among women, and at the same time, results in the organization of inequality of status and race worldwide, across the borders of nation states. Therefore, the matter of the migration of female is a mutually complex issue that require multilateral and multilayered approaches.

In order to resolve the problems of the feminization of migration and the marginalization of migrant women, the problem of migration needs to be first analyzed from a gender-sensitive dimension, and a migration policy based on this should be established. By understanding the traits and migration situation of female migrant differing from that of male, and acquiring data related to gender-divided migration, a systematic mechanism that can collect and share information on the migration of women should be prepared. Moreover, the problem of migration is a global issue that should be dealt with from the viewpoint that the many sides of international migration and developments are all sustainable developments. By examining the migration of women according to the relationships between migration, development and gender in discussing the problem of migration in the international society, we may be able to respond more effectively to the several problems arising from migration not only on a national level but also on an international level.

In addition, a multilateral cooperative relationship should be established to prevent the violation of human rights and the problems of exploitation that arise in the overall process of migration, that is, from making the decision to migrate through the process of migration to the settlement after migration. In other words, a desirable global governance system that can manage over-the-border migration of female effectively should be established. At the same time, as an alternative to prevent the

marginalization of migrants who fail to be integrated into the migrating societies, a program should be set up to contrive an understanding of foreign cultures and native cultures as well as generosity and an understanding of difference as a new means of understanding a multicultural society, by attempting a cultural approach through which the social relationship between migrants and members of the community can be strengthened and the migrants can be provided with equal opportunities. In this manner, more consideration should be given to finding ways through which all can live together in harmony.

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