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## **EXTENDING HOSPITALITY TO THE WOMEN MIGRANT WORKERS IN HONG KONG**

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### **Abstract**

This article examines the phenomenon of labour migration in an age of globalization, particularly the women migrant workers in Hong Kong, and suggests some principles and social virtues in Catholic social thought which can uphold their dignity. Women migrant workers, very often, have to face the problems of sexism, racism and classism in a private working environment. The challenges they face are multidimensional, including personal, familial, interpersonal, and structural. This article first examines the phenomenon of labour migration with the concept of social exclusion. After this, employing narratives of migrant women, the situation of the women migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong and the problems that they face are examined. Finally, based on the key principles of Catholic social teaching and the virtues of hospitality and solidarity, the author offers some ethical reflections.

### **Introduction**

Treating the poor and the marginalized with care and hospitality has been an important teaching and lived experience of Christians in the early Church.<sup>1</sup> Since the Second Vatican Council, the social

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<sup>1</sup>Amy G. Oden, ed., *And You Welcomed Me: A Sourcebook on Hospitality in Early Christianity*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001, 13.

mission of the Church has been delineated explicitly, stating that the Church is in this world and serves this world, helping people to understand themselves and renew human society.<sup>2</sup> The Church deeply believes that the challenges that human persons face relate closely with this social mission: ethical problems brought by technological development, pluralism and various kinds of differences in the world, globalization and the sufferings that people face in daily life and so on. The Church is willing to accompany people in the face of these challenges. In this way, the Church hopes to create a new political, social and economic order, expressed through peace, justice, and solidarity, based on human dignity and freedom.<sup>3</sup>

In reading and discerning the sign of the times, the phenomenon of globalization undeniably brings new challenges to the Catholic Church, particularly Catholic social thought. Globalization represents both a threat and an opportunity in relation to progressive social transformation. Some see it a unique opportunity for humanity to overcome hunger, poverty, and deprivation; whereas others oppose it as a new form of savage capitalism, a free market international integration that causes social disintegration in the developing world, marked by inequality, lack of reciprocity, and the marginalization of those with less power,<sup>4</sup> creating social exclusion of certain groups of people.<sup>5</sup>

In this article, I would like to focus on the phenomenon of labour migration in an age of globalization in general, and the women migrant workers in Hong Kong in particular, who are socially excluded. Women migrant workers, very often, have to face the problems of sexism, racism and classism in a private working environment. The problems they face are different from other workers. In the following, I will first examine the phenomenon of labour migration with the concept of social exclusion. After this,

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<sup>2</sup>*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 44.

<sup>3</sup>Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004, nos. 16-19.

<sup>4</sup>About the impact of globalization, please refer to *The Globalization Reader*, ed. Frank Lechner John Boli, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000, 14-16, 21-26, 148-154; James E. Hug, "Economic Justice and Globalization," in *Globalization and Catholic Social Thought: Present Crisis, Future Hope*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2005, 55-61. See also Michael P. Hornsby-Smith, *An Introduction to Catholic Social Thought*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 219-220.

<sup>5</sup>John Gray, "Inclusion: A Radical Critique," 19-36, and Ruth Lister, "Strategies for Social Inclusion: Promoting Social Cohesion or Social Justice?" 37-54, both in *Social Inclusion: Possibilities and Tensions*, ed., Peter Askonas and Angus Stewart, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000.

employing narratives of migrant women, I will discuss the situation of the women migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong and the problems that they face. Finally, I will offer some ethical reflections.<sup>6</sup>

### **Women Labour Migration and Social Exclusion**

Migration, both intra- and international, is a common phenomenon in an age of globalization. Migration is multidirectional and full of complexities.<sup>7</sup> Labour migration or labour export has become one of the key features, as well as an outcome, of neo-liberal globalization in some countries, such as the Philippines. Women play an increasing role in all regions and all types of migration and that the migrant is a gendered subject. In the context of gendered labour markets, female immigrant labour may be recruited for particular kinds of jobs in the globalized economy, such as domestic service.<sup>8</sup> Some scholars call the globalizing domestic service “global care chain.”<sup>9</sup>

National employment policies and political instability of the sending countries contribute significantly to international migration, and they affect the gender composition of migration. For example, the Philippines government started a labour export policy beginning in the mid-1970s in response to the debt crisis caused by the structural adjustment policies of the International Monetary Fund and the growing unemployment rate in the Philippines, which has become the top labour exporting country in the world. In the 1980s and early 1990s, Filipinas were by far the most numerous among women workers in Asia, and in 1992 the number of women migrant workers

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<sup>6</sup>This article is extracted and modified from chapter 6 of my unpublished dissertation. *Toward an Ethic of Solidarity and Reciprocity with the Marginalized: Catholic and Confucian Social Ethics in Dialogue*, Berkeley: Graduate Theological Union, 2014.

<sup>7</sup>Globally in 2013 there were 232 million international migrants, and women comprised 48 percent. Among the 136 million international migrants living in the North, 60 percent originated from a developing country. Among the 96 million international migrants residing in developing countries, 86 percent originated from the South. See Population Division, United Nations Economic and Social Council, *International Migration Report 2013*. [http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/migration/migrationreport2013/Full\\_Document\\_final.pdf#zoom=100](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/migration/migrationreport2013/Full_Document_final.pdf#zoom=100) (accessed 10 May 2014).

<sup>8</sup>Ruth Lister, *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives*, Second Edition, Washington Square, New York: New York University Press, 1997, 2003, 45.

<sup>9</sup>Employing the “global care chain” concept of Arlie Hochschild, Nicola Yeates points out that the global care chain process reflects social divisions of wealth and inequalities, in which richer households contracting members of poorer households. The differences in class standing are reproduced. See Nicola Yeates, *Globalizing Care Economies and Migrant Workers: Explorations in Global Care Chains*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, 40-43.

from the Philippines exceeded the number of men. Meanwhile, throughout most of the 1990s, the demand for women migrant workers in East and Southeast Asia grew, especially for domestic workers in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and Malaysia, a demand met mainly by women from the Philippines and Indonesia.<sup>10</sup>

Feminization of export labour and the commodification of migrant labour have become the main features of the labour export policy of the Philippines. Women comprised approximately 70 percent of export labour, the majority of whom are in domestic service work.<sup>11</sup> According to sociologist Ligaya Lindio-McGovern, the feminization of labour export reflects the globalization of reproductive labour, turning it into a wage commodity in the foreign household where others profit from the trade. She points out that reproductive labour, domestic work force caring for the young and elderly and maintaining of the household, used to be done largely as unpaid labour by women. But now it becomes linked to capital accumulation as it gets globalized. As women in the host country started working in the formal wage economy, the unpaid reproductive labour was relegated to migrant women who could be paid cheaply. This kind of economic migration can be considered a kind of forced migration due to the negative consequences of neo-liberal globalization. Migrant workers described themselves as “hanging on a double-edge sword” — if they stayed they would not be able to provide for their families’ basic needs, yet their lives as migrant domestic workers were difficult and full of sacrifices.<sup>12</sup>

Income of foreign domestic workers is an important source of revenue for their home governments and for employment agencies in receiving countries. But it does not initiate sustainable development. Gemma T. Cruz points out that the prevailing global job market is unjust, especially for women. The new international division of labour defines female roles in terms of sexuality, reproduction, and domesticity with a market ethos of commodification. Migrant workers are regarded as needed, but unwanted, cheap, and exploited. Their jobs are dirty, dangerous, and disdained.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Nicole Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong: Stories of Migrant Workers*, London: Cornell University Press, 2007, 34.

<sup>11</sup>Ligaya Lindio-McGovern, *Globalization, Labor Export and Resistance: A Study of Filipino Migrant Domestic Workers in Global Cities*, London: Routledge, 2012, 25.

<sup>12</sup>Lindio-McGovern, *Globalization, Labor Export and Resistance*, 26–27.

<sup>13</sup>Gemma T. Cruz, “Between Identity and Security: Theological Implications of Migration in the Context of Globalization,” *Theological Studies* 69 (2008) 367.

Employing the concept of social exclusion and inclusion to examine the case of women migrant workers, we can understand more how they are excluded and marginalized in a society. Economist Amartya Sen argues that the concept of social exclusion is useful in studying human deprivation under the negative social impact of globalization because of its focus on the multidimensionality of deprivation and its emphasis on relational processes rather than the individual.<sup>14</sup> It is a new conceptual paradigm to understand and deal with all aspects of poverty, inequality and oppression in the era of globalization.<sup>15</sup> Various forms of exclusion are combined: participation in decision-making and political processes, access to employment and material resources and integration into common cultural processes.<sup>16</sup> Exclusion from political decision-making is crucial here and social exclusion is seen as a structural and inherent feature of an unequal system based on power differentials. Ruth Lister argues that exclusion has to be tackled at both the material and the symbolic level and across a range of dimensions of inequalities.<sup>17</sup>

Being socially excluded in their homeland, women migrant workers cannot find jobs in their countries and have to work overseas. When they work in another country, they have to face the problems of being excluded from political participation, welfare protection, labour rights, and legal protection as other citizens. They are also not respected as members of the society. After examining women labour migration in general, I am now going to discuss the situation of women migrant workers in Hong Kong.

### **Women Migrant Workers in Hong Kong**

Hong Kong is one of the places in Asia and one of the cities in the world that receives large number of migrant workers from the Philippines and Indonesia.<sup>18</sup> Migrants and migrant workers in Hong

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<sup>14</sup>Amartya Sen, *Social Exclusion: Concept, Application, and Scrutiny*, Manila: Asian Development Bank, 2000, 8.

<sup>15</sup>In the 1990s the notion of social exclusion emerged as a new paradigm in relation to the study of poverty in Europe. Later, this notion was re-appropriated and adopted by international bodies (such as the International Labor Organization), and Asian scholars (such as Amartya Sen) and Asian organizations (such as Asian Development Bank).

<sup>16</sup>Ronaldo Munck, *Globalization and Social Exclusion: A Transformationalist Perspective*, Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2005, 22.

<sup>17</sup>Ruth Lister, "Strategies for Social Inclusion: Promoting Social Cohesion or Social Justice?" in *Social Inclusion: Possibilities and Tensions*, ed. Peter Askonas and Angus Stewart, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000, 50-52.

<sup>18</sup>In 2011, out of the 7.1 million population of Hong Kong, there were about 451,000 people, or about 6.4 percent of the population, who were ethnic minorities. The

Kong are regarded as a “small and invisible population,” not at the top of any agenda of the policy makers. Below I will delineate narratives of two migrant women, from the Philippines and Indonesia respectively, and the challenges they face in general.

Dally was a foreign domestic helper from the Philippines.<sup>19</sup> She went to work in Hong Kong in 1993 at the age of 23. She had just finished college in the Philippines with a major in education. Unable to find a job in her homeland, and needing to help her parents solve their financial problems and support her two brothers to study, she decided to go to work in Hong Kong as a domestic worker for a family of five. She found it difficult to adjust at the beginning of her work. She worked 16 to 18 hours every day, doing anything from washing dishes to hand-washing clothes to cleaning the car. She was often scolded and treated rudely by her employers. In addition to this, she could not get her full salary and was deprived of her days off. She tolerated such treatment for six months because she feared losing her job. She then tried to bargain with her employers, but this resulted in her being locked up in the kitchen. Finally, she sought help from a Filipina neighbor and reported to the police. Despite her experience, Dally still wanted to work in Hong Kong, hoping to meet a better employer. She had no luck in this.

Nina, a 26-year-old Indonesian woman, also worked as a domestic helper when she first went to Hong Kong.<sup>20</sup> She worked through an employment agency to secure a job. Once in Hong Kong, both the Indonesian and Hong Kong employment agents told her that she must pay extortionate agency fees amounting to US\$2,692 through a debt-bondage arrangement. Upon arrival in Hong Kong, her passport and employment contract were taken by the Hong Kong agent, who told her that they had been confiscated “for safekeeping and to prevent her from running away from her employer.” Nina was held under the continued threat of penalty as she was subjected to on-

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majority of the ethnic minorities in Hong Kong (about 285,000) are employed as foreign domestic workers, a legal distinction from local domestic workers. Most of these people are women from the Philippines (about 48 percent) and Indonesia (49 percent), migrant workers who hold employment visas. See Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department, *2011 Population Census. Thematic Report: Ethnic Minorities*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, 2011.

<sup>19</sup>Dally's story is taken from Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 182–186.

<sup>20</sup>Nina's story is taken from Peggy Lee and Carole Petersen, *Forced Labour and Debt Bondage in Hong Kong: A Study of Indonesian and Filipina Domestic Workers*, Center for Comparative and Public Law Occasional Papers, No.16, Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong, 2006, 35–36.

going verbal, psychological, and physical abuse. She was denied all days off, denied sufficient food, and made to work 20 hours a day with less than four hours of sleep per night. At first, she was too afraid to leave her employment and did not know where to seek assistance. The physical violence escalated as her female employer kicked her in the back on multiple occasions, causing painful back injuries. Nina finally managed to escape when she encountered another Indonesian. She was assisted by the woman workers' shelter to pursue her civil claims and to follow-up her police report of physical assault.

Dally and Nina are two among the 285,000 foreign domestic workers in Hong Kong. While not all domestic workers have such bad experiences, experiences like those of Dally and Nina should not be ignored. The demand for large numbers of women migrant workers originated with the increase in wealth of upper and middle-class Hong Kong Chinese and decrease in the availability of local workers since the 1970s.<sup>21</sup> Foreign domestic workers were permitted to enter Hong Kong with short-term visas and two-year contracts to help meet the demand for domestic helpers. Lindio-McGovern points out that due to increasingly privatized social reproduction, the richer, labour-receiving countries needed a source of cheap reproductive labour, and women from poorer countries were the ones made to supply such work. The labour export policy provides a steady supply of domestic workers. The labour-receiving societies try to make such labour forces compliant through labour-control mechanisms, such as through labour import and immigration policies.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the high demand and important contributions of these foreign domestic workers, very often they do not receive just recognition, treatment, respect, or appreciation from the government and local people. This is seen regularly in the biased images and

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<sup>21</sup>In the 1970s and 1980s, many middle-class, educated women entered the paid workforce with the development of the service industry. With the growing number of double-income families, there was a need for hiring helpers in childcare and housework, mainly from the Philippines. Since the mid-1990s, with the aging of the population in Hong Kong, there were more and more foreign workers from Indonesians who learned to speak some Cantonese, thus, suitable to take care the elderly who only speak Cantonese. Filipinas were still preferred by those with small children for their ability to speak and teach the children English. See Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 27, 30.

<sup>22</sup>Lindio-McGovern, *Globalization, Labor Export and Resistance*, 31; Gemma Tulud Cruz, *An Intercultural Theology of Migration: Pilgrims in the Wilderness*, Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2010, 18.

stereotypes of the domestic workers depicted in the local newspapers. Many newspaper editorials and reports depict negative images of Filipinas as spoiled, overpaid, and more of a hindrance than a help to Hong Kong residents. The Filipina women are criticized for not appearing grateful for the privilege of working in Hong Kong where they were provided with a good working environment and a higher salary than possible in their own country. Whenever there were cases of stealing or ill-treatment of children or the elderly in the households where they worked, the domestic workers were described as thieves or vengeful maids and became headline news. The overemphasis on these cases generated the misconception that domestic workers were customarily dangerous and untrustworthy. Moreover, as outsiders, they were easily made scapegoats during the economic recession.<sup>23</sup>

The ill-treatment of Dally and Nina were not isolated cases. Legal scholars Carole Peterson and Peggy Lee found that a number of domestic helpers they interviewed were victims of forced labour or debt bondage or both, suffering from salary deductions and underpayment of salary, and confiscation of passport and employment contracts.<sup>24</sup> They also found that their interviewees worked long hours and without days off. Some domestic workers were forced to perform additional work at a location other than the contractual address, which is illegal. Many suffered from verbal abuse, physical assault (such as slaps, punches, kicks in the back or having a hot iron placed on their arm), sexual harassment, and even rape. Some were not provided enough food or decent accommodation.

As foreign domestic workers, these women were required to sign a contract, outlining the rules and policies, presumably with guarantees of certain labour rights. However, while certain rules and policies are enforced, they are often interpreted in favour of the rights of the employer over those of the worker, for example, the "New

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<sup>23</sup>In the 1990s and 2000s, the minimum allowable wage for foreign domestic workers was reduced, with the rationale that foreign workers must share the economic burden faced by locals during economic downturns. See Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 36–37, 132–133; Vivienne Wee and Amy Sim, "Hong Kong as a Destination for Migrant Domestic Workers," in *Asian Women as Transnational Domestic Workers*, ed. Shirlena Huang, Brenda S.A. Yeoh, and Noor A. Rahman, Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 2005, 182–185.

<sup>24</sup>Lee and Petersen conducted a study on the problems faced by the Indonesian and Filipino migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong in 2005 and 2006. The two scholars interviewed twenty-two women who were clients of an organization that provided assistance to abused workers. For details of the report, please refer to Lee and Petersen, *Forced Labour and Debt Bondage in Hong Kong*.



Conditions of Stay” rule, which is usually referred to as the “two-week rule.”<sup>25</sup> Domestic workers may be unaware of their rights or of how to report their grievances. Even if they know their rights, they may choose not to act because the personal and financial costs involved in filing an official grievance against their employer often outweigh any benefits they may gain. In the majority of cases domestic workers do not have the financial resources, the time, or the confidence to pursue their claims through the maze of Labour and Immigration Department officials, hearings, tribunals, courts, and offices.<sup>26</sup> Too often when they summoned the courage to file a criminal complaint against an employer with the police, their abuse cases, which usually had no other witness, were dismissed by the police, who refused to record the complaint officially.<sup>27</sup>

In spite of all the challenges and difficulties they face, women workers should not be regarded as passive and powerless victims of globalization; nor should their expressions of empowerment and agency, both subtle and overt, be ignored. Some domestic workers have joined migrant workers’ groups and become active members, even leaders. They gain support and confidence, and are empowered in these groups. They participate in overt forms of political action such as protest and demonstration, as well as subtle forms of resistance, such as forming a support group among themselves. After working alone in the employer’s home all week, on Sunday in a public square or park or in the Church, foreign workers gather, gaining strength in numbers. During this time they can ignore the insults common to daily life and enjoy sisterhood.<sup>28</sup>

### **Ethical Reflection**

From the above narratives and analysis, we can see that each one of these migrant women has her own unique story. If we look at them as numbers without attending to the complexities of each life, we may

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<sup>25</sup>The two-week rule, which requires workers to return home within two weeks of the termination of their contracts, was supposedly created to prevent domestic workers from job hopping. But the rule encourages workers to endure poor working conditions and maltreatment for fear of being forced to return home. See Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 146–147.

<sup>26</sup>Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 120.

<sup>27</sup>Lee and Petersen, *Forced Labour and Debt Bondage in Hong Kong*, 35–36. For an in-depth study of the problems and situation of Indonesian migrant workers in Hong Kong, please refer to Asian Migrant Centre, *Underpayment: Systematic Extortion of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Hong Kong. An In-Depth Study of Indonesian Labor Migration in Hong Kong*, Hong Kong: AMC, 2005.

<sup>28</sup>Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 170.

neglect a special need, without affirming them as human persons with dignity. We may feel indifference for them and not take any steps toward showing them concern. Their identities as migrants, women, and lower class lead them to face a threefold marginalization based on ethnicity, sex, and class. As migrants, they shoulder the burden of dislocation, separation from their families, and adjustment. As temporary workers, many are unable to enjoy basic civil rights and protection, decent living and working conditions, family and social relationships, and respect as local citizens. As domestic live-in workers, there is a lack of privacy and they are isolated from the bigger society. As women, they may face the risk of sexual harassment. The challenges they face are multidimensional, including personal, familial, interpersonal, and structural. Many of these problems need government efforts to improve policies and services for migrant women. However, local people, including the Catholic community in Hong Kong, should be transformed as they can play an important role in making the lives of the migrant women easier, showing support to them for striving basic rights. Below, based on some key themes in Catholic social thoughts, I will offer some reflections.

### **Justice and Human Rights**

As demonstrated above, migrant women are forced to face marginalization on three fronts, based on their ethnicity, sex, and class; many are unable to enjoy basic civil rights. Justice is both a key theme in the Scripture and Catholic social teaching, and a cardinal virtue in the Catholic tradition. In the Scripture, justice has the meaning of showing concern for the weak and vulnerable, which is mandated in law; and biblical justice always has a prophetic dimension, by virtue of entering into conflict with oppressive structures of injustice. Justice aims at restoring our right relationships with God, human persons, and the creation.<sup>29</sup> Justice teaches us that the well-being of individual and community are interrelated in such a way that “what promotes one promotes the other, and what harms one harms the other as well.”<sup>30</sup> In Catholic social thought, social justice is expressed through principles such as upholding human dignity and human rights, option for the poor, common good, participation, right to integral development, and so on. These principles offer

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<sup>29</sup>Paul Wadell, *Happiness and the Christian Moral life*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012, 230-32.

<sup>30</sup>Jean Porter, *The Recovery of Virtue: The Relevance of Aquinas for Christian Ethics*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990, 127.

direction to build a just and fair society in which people can lead a good life.<sup>31</sup>

The principle that all human persons have the same and equal human dignity, regardless of one's status, gender, race, and class, is of utmost importance in upholding the dignity of migrant women. This is a foundational principle in the CST, as human persons were created in the image of God. Every person is an end in him/herself, not a means to some other purpose. Every human being has tremendous worth and value and should be treated with great respect. The dignity of people must come before profit.<sup>32</sup> All people have to help each other to flourish. Each migrant or migrant worker is a human person and should not be treated as a commodity or a mere workforce.<sup>33</sup> Women cannot be looked upon as an object or a tool.<sup>34</sup>

In Catholic social teaching, human rights are moral rights that affirm the dignity of the poor and the marginalized, offering concrete duties of provision and protection. Catholic human rights discourse emphasizes both rights and duties, structural change and personal responsibility, and the common good and solidarity with the deprived.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, in affirming the dignity of every human person, together with human rights, many Catholic organizations and parishes often uphold other key principles of CST, such as the option for the poor, family and community, economic justice, the common good, the right to work and dignity of workers, solidarity, participation, and the constructive role of government. All these principles are important in giving justice and support to the oppressed migrants. As principles, these key notions or themes set the direction for people to follow and are norms for acting. They also illustrate the conditions or elements that a good society should possess.

However, apart from these principles, there is a need to develop a perception among Christians that will give rise to compassion for the marginalized migrants. Perceptions can guide our moral

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<sup>31</sup>John A. Coleman, "Making the Connections: Globalization and Catholic Social Thought," in *Globalization and Catholic Social Thought: Present Crisis, Future Hope*, ed. John A. Coleman and William F. Ryan, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Book, 2005, 16-18; Daniel G. Groody, *Globalization, Spirituality, and Justice*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007, 101.

<sup>32</sup>John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, no. 6.

<sup>33</sup>Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 25.

<sup>34</sup>John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, no. 15.

<sup>35</sup>Mee-Yin Mary Yuen, "Human Rights in China: Examining the Human Rights Values in Chinese Confucian Ethics and Roman Catholic Social Teachings," *Intercultural Human Rights Law Review* 8 (2013) 306-317.

imaginations and thus affect our attitudes and moral actions.<sup>36</sup> One can be judgmental and bias, both cognitively and affectively, against the migrants, but we can also transform ourselves as well as the unjust social structures to have a different perception and imagination through fostering relational virtues. One way to do this is to foster social virtues in the Catholic community through social practice and spiritual practice.<sup>37</sup>

### The Virtue of Hospitality

Migrant women workers are people who moved from their homelands to Hong Kong temporarily or permanently. The first thing they face is a new and unfamiliar environment. To welcome aliens and attend to otherness, to see strangers as partners rather than other, we need to practice the virtue of hospitality. As Christians, the first step is to affirm our identity as disciples of Jesus, to make commitment to follow his footsteps in serving the poor and the marginalized. The gospels portray Jesus as the model of a hospitable host, always welcoming guests from the margins of the society.<sup>38</sup> Jesus teaches his disciples: anyone who welcomes a foreigner or a stranger welcomes him, and anyone who welcomes him, welcomes the one who sent him (Mt 10:40; 25:35). He also teaches that what one does to “the least,” or the most vulnerable, is done to him (Mt 25:31-46). The breaking of the bread and sharing in the feast also symbolize hospitality in a sacred community. Jesus practiced hospitality in words and deeds. Taken as a feature of Christian life, Church historian Amy G. Oden argues, “hospitality is not so much a singular act of welcome as it is a way, an orientation that attends to otherness, listening and learning, valuing and honouring. The hospitable one looks for God’s redemptive presence in the other. It is always a spiritual discipline of opening one’s own life to God’s life and revelation.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>William O’Neill and William C. Spohn, “Rights of Passage: The Ethics of Immigration and Refugee Policy,” *Theological Studies* 59, 1 (March 1999) 84 (21). Religion and Philosophy. Gale. Holy Spirit Seminary Library.<<http://find.galegroup.com/itx/start.do?prodId=SPJ.SP00>> (accessed 11 July 2010).

<sup>37</sup>Some scholars suggest the importance of fostering virtues in realizing the Catholic social mission. See Christopher P. Vogt, “Fostering a Catholic Commitment to the Common Good: An Approach Rooted in Virtue Ethics,” *Theological Studies* 68 (2007) 400; James P. O’Sullivan, “Virtue and Catholic Social Teaching,” *Asian Horizons* 6, 4 (Dec 2012) 824.

<sup>38</sup>While most people do not care about the sick, the tax-collectors, prostitutes, and so on, Jesus approached these marginalized people (and sinners) and treated them well. See Mt 11:18; Mk 8:1-4.

<sup>39</sup>Oden, *And You Welcomed Me*, 114–15.

We need to open ourselves and to learn the migrant women's situations from their perspectives, affirming each one of them as a person with dignity and value. This involves the threefold dimensions of moral cultivation — knowing their contextual realities directly through their own narratives, feeling their feelings and needs, and practicing hospitality.

We need to understand that foreign domestic worker has a name and dignity; she is not a commodity or a slave or a burden to the society. If Hong Kong people, particularly the employers, recognize the foreign domestic workers as guest workers who help us to lighten our burden of housework, we would treat them with respect and appreciation, and pay them fair remuneration. We would feel gratitude to have them taking care of our family members. Their salary would be the salary they deserve for their hard work, not some special favour from us. With this perception, we would better appreciate the situation of domestic helpers who have to separate from their own family and work for another family. We would understand that they need time to adjust to the Hong Kong culture and lifestyle of their employers, which often is in stark contrast to their own. We would not blame them for occupying public places during their holidays when they gather with their friends.

### **The Virtue of Solidarity**

Solidarity, as a moral virtue and social attitude, helps us to have and feel the conviction of the unity and interdependence of all human beings. It is not only a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of people, both near and far.<sup>40</sup> It concerns with relationships and mutuality. It brings together elements of love and justice.<sup>41</sup> It moves us to see the other as ourselves — members of the human family. This awareness directs us to work for the common good of all.<sup>42</sup>

To be in persistent solidarity with the suffering, a person would welcome generously, listen carefully, converse truthfully, take responsibility wholeheartedly, treat others as equal partners humbly,

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<sup>40</sup>John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (On Social Concern, 1988), no. 38.

<sup>41</sup>Charles Curran, et al., "Commentary on *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (On Social Concern)," in *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretation*, ed. Kenneth R. Himes, Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004, 429.

<sup>42</sup>Marie Vianney Bilgrien, *Solidarity: A Principle, an Attitude, a Duty? Or the Virtue for an Interdependent World?* New York: Peter Lang, 1999, 106.

and be willing to change oneself wisely.<sup>43</sup> Since solidarity aims at the transformation of society through structural change, in practicing the virtue of solidarity, we would go beyond the individual compassionate and hospitable acts. Solidarity is a prominent theme in an age of globalization.<sup>44</sup> It is closely linked to social justice and it brings together love and justice. With solidarity, we would want to find the root causes of the problems that migrant women face. We would promote the dignity and affirm the human rights of the migrant women through advocacy. We would want to speak out against the injustice faced by the migrant women. We would want to commit to the common good. A person with the virtue of solidarity would probably support human rights advocacy.

With the virtues of solidarity, we would support just remuneration for foreign domestic helpers, fair implementation of laws and policies that stipulate their basic rights, enough training for the police so that they would treat the domestic helpers fairly without prejudice. In extending solidarity to the domestic helpers, on the local level, we would have concern for their well-being, including whether they are treated fairly by the employment agencies, their employers, the mass media, the police, and the general public. At an international level, we would have concern for whether or not the women migrant workers are regarded as commodities in the system of labour migration and in globalization of neo-liberal market capitalism.

## Conclusion

Women migrants are the most vulnerable in the migrant communities. In this article, I have shown the challenges and problems that the women migrant workers in Hong Kong face through their stories and analysis in general. The principles of justice, human dignity and common good set a direction or standard for us to follow so that they can tell what kind of actions we can engage in. Virtues of hospitality and solidarity are the skills that help us to nurture our disposition and decide how to act in a way that is good for our being and others. The social virtues can transform us to do good to the women migrant workers.

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<sup>43</sup>Leonardo Boff, *Virtues for another Possible World*, Translated by Alexandre Guilherme, Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011, 90-93.

<sup>44</sup>Pope John Paul II called for "a globalization of solidarity" and "a globalization without marginalization." See John Paul II, *Ecclesia of Asia*, no. 55.