

『イエムじゃない』

—— 香港で働くインドネシア人家事労働者の「つながりの平等」による主体性 ——

澤 井 志 保 *

Bukan Yem:
Subjectivity of Indonesian Domestic Workers in Hong Kong
Based on “Connection-Based Equality of Care”

SAWAI Shiho*

Abstract

In Indonesian literature, “*baboe/babu* (female maid/domestic worker)” appears recurrently as a prominent icon of lower-class women’s submission and subordination. For instance, *babu* oftentimes symbolizes a victim, a vamp, or a bimbo in the text, in the authors’ attempt to question the negative impacts of modernization processes in society. As a result, *babu* cements the derogatory images of women’s intimate labor at the intersection of gender and class, as the figure in the lowliest position amongst *nyai* (concubine) and *bini* (wife).

This links to the fact that the devaluation of female domestic work has occurred in tandem with the gendered division of the public and private spheres. Such gendered division assumes males as “independent” subjects and females as symbols of dependency. With intimate labor (including domestic labor) being defined as women’s work, women’s own need to be cared for has been stripped from “public” discourse. In this way, the welfare of domestic workers is oftentimes overlooked behind their care responsibilities.

However, the rising tide of transnational migration of Indonesian women as domestic workers has been redefining the meaning of intimate labor. This paper examines an award-winning short story written by an Indonesian woman who used to work as a domestic worker in Hong Kong and Singapore, to indicate how her text resists the conventional image of *babu* to inaugurate a brand-new subjectivity of female domestic worker, based on Eva Kittay’s notion of “connection-based equality of care.” For this purpose, I elucidate that this text underscores caretakers’ right to equality in carrying out their duties without giving up their own safety and welfare, something that is embedded within the relationship between two Indonesian domestic worker protagonists.

First, I examine the fetish of *babu* as presented in existing prominent literary works. Second, I explore the story in question to point out how it deliberately employs an outrageous domestic worker protagonist in a way that apparently deviates from the aforementioned stereotypes of the domestic worker. By doing so, I argue that this deviant protagonist effectually defamiliarizes the conventional image of a female domestic worker in a Freudian sense of *unheimlich*, to unveil the people’s prejudice crystalized behind it. Third, I indicate how the two protagonists exchange mutual care and attention, although they do not give up their own dignity and reasons. Such portrayals remind us of the “care inequality” of caretakers, which in turn suggests their vulnerability in receiving their fair share of care in the name of work responsibilities. From these points, I conclude that the text successfully unsettles and contests the fetish of domestic workers as care servitude, thus radically questioning how to build up better definitions of equality, autonomy, and dependency in caring for others, by revisiting them from the viewpoints of the time of globalizing intimate-labor migration.

Keywords: Indonesian literature, transnational migrant domestic workers, *babu*, subjectivity, intimate labor, connection-based equality of care

キーワード：インドネシア語文学，国際移住家事労働者，バブ，主体性，親密性労働，つながりの平等

* 天理大学国際学部；Faculty of International Studies, Tenri University, 1050 Somanouchi, Tenri, Nara 632-8510, Japan
e-mail: sawais@tenri-u.ac.jp