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Designing the export of nurses: whither “Asian values” in the emigration policies of the Philippines?

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Abstract

How do governments in the Global South, with abundant supply of labor, reconcile the positive utility of promoting labor migration and the wider effects that emigration has on the families left behind? Taking the case of the Philippines, the world’s largest exporter of nurses (a female-dominated profession), this chapter shows how the public policy perspective sheds light on the ways in which policymakers in the Philippines reconciled the need for economic growth and the preservation of core cultural values of the country. Situating our analysis within the context of “Asian values,” we trace the policymakers’ policy narratives in the design process of the Philippine Nursing Act of 2002 and reveal how the debates revolved around securing the market for Philippines’ nurse-migration industry. In so doing, we conclude that while the country belongs to the cultural heritage of Asia, which upholds strong family ties and the central role of women in the rearing of children, its governance structure and regulatory practices have reconfigured Asian values to promote and prioritize economic growth over the core values of the family.

1. Introduction

The production of labor for export is an emergent development policy for developing countries that have an abundant supply of labor (see Skeldon, 2009). These countries serve as the suppliers of labor to developed economies experiencing chronic shortages of labor due to, *inter alia*, structural changes in the labor market such as aging demographics. While developing countries actively promote labor migration because remittances generally boost economic growth, the question remains: How do governments of the Global South address the need for economic growth and the wider effects of emigration on the families left behind when designing labor migration policies?

“Asian values” (without quotation hereafter), following their cultural roots in Confucianism, conceive and promote the notion that society is hierarchal and paternalistic, with family as the basic unit or model of governance (Barr, 2000; Yung, 2012). Although the remnants of Western ideas from the long-history of colonization continue to influence the decision-making of some Southeast Asian countries (e.g. the Philippines) (see Jetschke, 1999), a closer examination of the governance structure in the region illustrates how these countries interpret, integrate, or discount Asian values in its most significant policy areas such as economic development and labor migration. Although some scholars and policymakers have argued that there may not be any tension between the Western-led neoliberal framework and Asian values (see Robison, 1996), the way some emerging economies in Asia attempt to challenge this synchrony when examining the core value of family and state-led labor export remain less investigated.

Over the past few decades, Southeast Asia has dramatically witnessed an increasing level of labor mobility within and outside of the region as countries function as either producers or consumers of labor. In this chapter, we demonstrate how certain existing governance structures and political institutions in Southeast Asia are more likely to discount the tension embedded in Asian values, particularly the role of women in the family, when seeking to implement neoliberal practices in the area of labor migration. While some countries in the region have embraced neoliberal migration policies that promote labor export as the primary lever for pumping economic growth through remittances, we specifically ask: How does the policy design of labor export policies address Asian values when female migrants aspire to upward economic and social mobility for themselves and their family members?

Taking the case of the Philippines as the top producer of nurses (a female dominated labor profession) in the world, this chapter examines how the policymakers portray the Filipino nurses in the design of the Philippine Nursing Act of 2002 (from here onwards, the Nursing Act), which was signed into law on October 21st, 2002. In contrast to Singapore and Malaysia, which are strong advocates of Asian values, the Philippines is not a major case study for Asian values considering the country's dominant Western-influenced governance. However, in debates between human rights and economic development within the Asian values, the country serves as a good case because of its portrayal of "Asian familism" or values reflecting "family, rather than the individual, defines notion of public good" (Diokno, 2003, p. 77).

Our starting point is Cabanda's (2017) empirical study of the Nursing Act, which underlines the government's policy position to promote the emigration of nurses through higher education policies and practices that prepare them for foreign employment. While Cabanda (2017) focuses on the process of designing this law by analyzing the different stages of the enactment process, this chapter examines the different policy narratives the policymakers advanced about Filipino nurses in the legislative process. In doing so, our findings show how and why legislators were far more interested in exporting nurses than retaining them in the country to address domestic labor shortages. Specifically, these legislators were steered by the positive contribution of remittances to economic growth and the international recognition of producing "world class" nurses, a source of national pride for a country with strong implications to its supposed heritage of Asian values.

This chapter is structured as follows. In the next section, we present Asian values to illustrate the "Asian way" of politics and governance which situate the policy narratives that evolved in designing the Nursing Act. Next, we present the case of the Philippines and highlight the strong neoliberal position of the country in producing labor for foreign employment in exchange for monetary remittances that are assumed to boost economic growth. Drawing from Asian values, we delineate the dominating policy narratives portraying Filipino nurses as economic migrants with the policymakers evading the gender perspective during the enactment process. We find that the discursive stronghold of the core Asian values of family in governance structure is weakened when confronted with the neoliberal economic agenda in the Philippines. This chapter concludes that, while the country belongs to the cultural heritage of Asia that upholds strong family ties and the important role of women in bringing up their children, the governance structure and regulatory practices have reconfigured Asian values to

prioritize economic growth over the core values of the family. In so doing, we further engage in debates between economic versus normative considerations in a highly contested policy area of migration.

2. Asian values

The Asian values debate emerged in the early 1990s when countries in Southeast and East Asia gained economic and regional power in the Western-dominated global economy. The Asian values are a “challenge to Western hegemonic thoughts and civilizations,” deeply implanted in many Asian nations that “harbor deep resentment against the West for its past colonialism and who have an inferiority complex in regards to Western civilization” (Hoon, 2004, p. 151). Specifically, it challenges Western ideas on the universality of human rights (Barr, 2000) and “Western style” civil and political freedoms (Hoon, 2004, p. 155). The Asian values approach promotes three core ideas: (1) the non-universality of human rights; (2) family-centered structures where interests of the family take precedence over individual interests; and (3) emphasis on collective social and economic rights over individual political rights (Hoon, 2004, p. 155). Through these core principles, Asian countries make policy decisions by seeing the state as the “guardian of the general interests of the society, above and against the contest of vested interest” (Robison, 1996, p. 311).

The high stake of family life, especially the role of women, is a significant element of Asian values that governments in Southeast Asia like to invoke (Eng & Blake, 1998, p. 188). The responsibility evolves around caring for children, sick and the elderly, and the decision to hire domestic helpers (Willis & Yeoh, 2000, p. 255) while their “qualification and employment” weakens the cohesion of the family (Langguth, 2003, pp. 32–33). To a greater extent, women have a more significant role in the family amid the increasing openness of global markets. Yeoh & Willis (1999, p. 359) write:

While men are associated with mobility and agility to grapple with newly fluid and somewhat erratic forms of transnational capital, women are often positioned in official state discourse as stabilising forces of the “home”—the cultural carriers of “Asian values” [...]

Although these scholars convey the state narratives about the role of women in the family, how policymakers incorporate these narratives in the design of policies that support, undermine, or reconfigure Asian values in light of growing global demand for labor is generally missing in designing migration policies in labor-producing countries of Asia. Migration remains a key phenomenon in the contemporary period, especially for economic purposes. It is therefore important to examine more closely how policymakers approach the unit of family, as generally understood within the Asian values framework, when designing public policies to promote, limit or altogether restrict emigration.

3. The Policy Design Approach in Examining the Nursing Act

Designing public policies requires specific goals that effectively address the policy problem. The better the policy is crafted, the greater the possibility of success of achieving the goals as originally set out (Turnbull, 2017, p. 2). According to Colebatch (2017, p. 2), policy design is part of the broad concept of “authoritative instrumentalism” which explains that the state, composed of government actors or leaders exercise their authority with various agendas and preferences to achieve their objectives. Simply put, the state is the fundamental actor in policy design. With the growing interconnectedness of the world system, policy design develops into a complex process that involves the network of government and non-government actors as policy actors in the policymaking process as a result of the “decentering of policy studies away from the centrality and authority of the state centeredness” (Howlett & Lejano, 2013, pp. 360–361). In this chapter, we define policy design as a:

[...] dynamic and deliberative process between policy actors, during which they exchange policy ideas (problems are coupled with solutions), provide and articulate justifications for their positions, and agree on and experiment with the steps forward based on existing knowledge (Chou & Ravinet, 2018, p. 1).

Conversely, Howlett & Lejano (2013, p. 360) explain that policy design contains two important components—substantive and procedural. The substantive component is a set of different alternatives to address policy problems while the procedural component contains different activities (such as formulating and decision-making) to achieve agreement among policy actors on policy alternatives. Essentially, these two components are significant in any analysis of the design process of public policies.

In designing policies, policy actors predominantly have differing views of the policy problems and competing proposals to provide solutions to the problems (Hoppe, 2017, p. 6). The interactions of the policy actors in the design process produce different policy narratives that reflect their position in shaping a particular policy. Roe (1994, p. 3) broadly defines policy narratives as:

[...] stories—scenarios and arguments—that are taken by one or more parties in the controversy as underwriting and stabilizing the assumptions for policymaking in the face of the issue’s uncertainty, complexity or polarization.

For example, definitions of policy problems contain “narrative structure” where there are “stories [...] heroes or villain [...] and they pit forces of evil against forces of good” (Stone, 2001, p. 138). These policy narratives reflect different frames which drive policy debates from problem identification to the details of implementation (see Hoppe, 2017). Consistently, the policy narratives lead to a more interpretative policy analysis by contextualizing these stories (Jones & McBeth, 2010, pp. 333–334). In this chapter, the policy design approach helps unveil how the policymakers in the Philippines prioritize economic value over maintaining the coherence of family when designing the Nursing Act.

4. The Case of the Philippines: Context, Legal Development and Policy

Nursing is considered a predominantly female profession. Basford & Slevin (2003, p. 392) explain that nurses are “perceived socially and culturally to be a feminine one [...] linked to the notion of human (feminine) caring values, and the domestic and nurturing role of women.” By contrast, some scholars claim that as early as the 4th and 5th century, there were male nurses out of well-established monastic orders who cared for the injured and wounded military knights; indeed, it was only when Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern-day nursing in 1863, declared nursing as a female occupation that it became associated with women (Evans, 2004). In the contemporary world, wealthy and developed countries such as the US, Canada, and the UK and some major nurse producing countries such as the Philippines have welcomed male nurses into their nursing registry due to the growing demand for care. For example, according to the results of the 2011 American Community Survey (ACS) on the participation of men in nursing, from a roughly 3% share of male nurses to the total

nursing workforce in the US in 1970, the share increased to 9% in 2011 (US Census Bureau, 2013).

The Philippines is known for its neoliberal policies in the production and export of labor (Rodriguez, 2010). For instance, the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act governs migrant workers and various laws on the production of Filipino seafarers, among others. Neoliberal policies assume that higher economic growth can be best achieved when the market is not restrained by state protection (Misra, Woodring, & Merz, 2006, p. 318) and could likewise necessitate an increase in state intervention “to roll forward new forms of governance [...] that are purportedly more suited to a market-driven [...] globalizing economy” (Jessop, 2002, p. 454). Consistently, the country is considered to be the top producer of foreign-trained nurses in the world.

Since the 1970s, the Philippines has been actively sending nurses abroad, with the US as one of the major destinations for Filipino nurses (Choy, 2003). To strengthen their position within this global market, over the decades, the country ensured that existing policies were well-implemented, updated and reflective of the most recent development in the international practice of professional nursing. Put simply, the country has contributed to establishing Philippine nurses as an international brand by ensuring that this important export “commodity” is seen as having achieved world standards.

Education, training and licensing of Filipino nurses are key areas in producing “globally” competitive nurses who are responsive to the needs of health systems at home and around the world. To ensure oversight of these key areas, the Philippines has adopted and implemented several important laws that govern nursing education and practice in the country. Although, since 1919 there have been different laws explicitly guiding the nursing practice (Table 1), Republic Act No. 877 of 1953, also known as the Philippine Nursing Law, served as the legal basis for all succeeding nursing legislation. This law specified the provisions on the composition of the Nursing Board that oversees education, licensing and nursing practice, the establishment of nursing schools, curriculum and compensation for nurses. Legislators amended this law in 1966 through Republic Act No. 4704 until further amendments in 1991 through Republic Act No. 7164 or the Philippine Nursing Act of 1991. The Nursing Act of 1991 paved the way for modernizing the nursing practice following the rapid changes in the global development of the nursing profession.

<Insert Table 1 about here>

As a result of a decade of changes in nursing curriculum and new nursing practices in countries such as the US and Canada, the Philippine Nursing Act of 1991 was repealed and replaced by the Republic Act No. 9173 or the Philippine Nursing Act of 2002. The Nursing Act serves as the principal policy regulating Philippine nursing education and practice. According to Cabanda (2017), although the Nursing Act governs the country's higher education and nursing practice, examining the process of designing the law revealed a strong emigration context. He explained that, in the making of this law, the legislators intended to educate nurses for export relying on nurses' remittances as a key factor in boosting economic growth.

Taking Cabanda's (2017) findings as our starting point, we ask: how then does the Philippine government address the Asian values it purportedly promotes? Indeed, the gender idioms with reference to men as "haligi ng tahanan" (pillar of the home) and women as "ilaw ng tahanan" (light of the home) are significant concepts at the core of the Philippine society and family (Parreñas, 2008, p. 1062). What happens to the home when the light is removed? These gendered roles raise crucial questions about the role of public policy in achieving important economic objectives while upholding norms and practices that have long been at the core of the society. We are primarily concerned with how the policy narratives presented during the design of the Nursing Act interpret Asian values and align them with the economic agenda that diminishes the potent role of women in the family.

5. Data and Method

To address the question we raised in the previous sections, we used the legislative documents from the House of Representatives and the Senate of the Philippines related to the enactment of the Philippine Nursing Act of 2002. Specifically, we used the minutes of public deliberations from the committee to plenary levels, proposed bills and committee reports; these documents are publicly accessible at the archives of these two legislative bodies.

Methodologically, we traced the policy narratives of the policymakers during the enactment process of the Nursing Act, the prevailing policy governing higher education, and the practice of nursing in the Philippines. The analysis of policy narratives entails the use of "existing

papers” such as “policy papers, bureaucratic forms, speeches” (van Eeten, 2006, p. 253), which are consistent with our existing data.

We manually coded the legislative documents and identified various narratives portraying Filipino nurses as economic migrants (see Annex 1 for the codebook). Our findings also point to the general silence about the gendering effects of promoting Filipino nurses for export. This has strong implications in the broad-spectrum of state-led women migration and its centrality in the family which is deeply rooted in Asian values—a theme to which we return in the concluding section. In the next section we will present our findings.

6. Exploring the Narratives in the Design Process of the Philippine Nursing Act of 2002: Economic Gain versus Normative Concerns

The Nursing Act of 2002 serves as a guiding policy in nursing education and profession in the Philippines. This agenda is set out in Article 1, Section 2, which describes the overall responsibility of the state to protect and improve the nursing profession to guarantee the delivery of quality basic health services and ensure that there are adequate nursing personnel in the country. The Act also highlights the improvements in nursing education, good working conditions, career prospects and dignified existence of nurses as principal elements of the Nursing Act. Despite the Act’s domestic context, the policy discussions behind the enactment of this law converged around the debate on the international mobility of Filipino nurses. These discussions portray Filipino nurses as economic migrants while remaining silent about the effects of nurse emigration within the confines of the family and the role of women within the context of Asian values.

This section traces the policy narratives and the factors that have led to the general silence about the societal effects of emigration. This process-tracing starts with the discussions of the proposed bills at the committee level, and moves on to the plenary-level, which saw the adoption and the passage of the law.

6.1 Filipino Nurses as Economic Migrants

While there is a long history of nursing policy in the Philippines dating back as early as 1919, the Philippine Nursing Act of 2002 is the current policy that governs the country’s nursing

education and profession. The Nursing Act of 2002 repealed and replaced the Philippine Nursing Act of 1991 due to the fast changing health care environment, medical technology, licensing practices, among others especially in the US and Canada. It also addresses domestic health care needs and employment concerns in the Philippines in view of the international mobility of nurses.

In October 2001, during the 11th Congress, Congressman Carlos Padilla and Rufus Rodriguez, Jr. filed two separate bills in the House of Representatives—House Bills No. 1084 and 676—which sought to repeal and replace the Philippine Nursing Act of 1991. The repeal of the 1991 Nursing Act aims to make the nursing profession more responsive to the rapidly changing context of health care in the country and the world amid demographic changes and the discovery of new technologies. The explanatory notes of these proposed bills provide us with the initial idea the sponsors had envisioned for the law through their portrayal of Filipino nurses.

In these House Bills, the two legislators portrayed the image of Filipino nurses as economic migrants by emphasizing the vulnerable employment status of nurses in the country. Congressman Padilla and Rodriguez, Jr. cited two economic-related factors—high employment rates and low remuneration of nurses in the Philippines—as motivations for nurses to seek employment in wealthier countries. For example, in the explanatory note of House Bill No. 1084, Congressman Carlos Padilla stressed the significant issue of employment in the nursing sector of the Philippines and the huge demand for foreign nurses in the US and Europe:

The nursing profession in the country has faced many problems, foremost of which is the very high unemployment and underemployment of nurses [...] the shortage of nurses back in the United States of America and Europe has caused the intensive recruitment of Filipino nurses for employment abroad (Par. 2, House Bill No. 1084).

By articulating demand and supply in comparative terms, Congressman Padilla presents the image of Filipino nurses as skilled economic migrants who are deskilled in their home countries as a result of the high unemployment and underemployment of nurses during the period when the Nursing Act was deliberated. Moreover, he points to voracious international demands for Filipino nurses, which frames this phenomenon as an area for potential govern-

ment intervention. Indeed, these bills also proposed to safeguard the local hospitals and health institutions as a safety mechanism in case of a possible shortage of nurses that may occur in the future if legislators do not properly give these issues the necessary policy attention. The provisions of the House Bills also aimed to strengthen regulation in education, licensing and professional practice of Filipino nurses. Although these bills sought to address future domestic shortages and the growing market for Filipino nurses abroad, this regulatory oversight presents the overall image of nurses as strategic economic actors who are willing to emigrate and explore more rewarding opportunities in other countries as a result of the then shrinking domestic demand for their skills.

In the Senate of the Philippines, there are three prominent sponsors of the new Nursing Act: Senators Juan Flavio Velasco, Loren Legarda-Leviste and Manuel Villar. Their sponsorship speeches promote their unwavering stance of Filipino nurses as modern-day heroes. They articulate the narrative of Filipino nurses as economic migrants through the framework of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), which remains a key pillar to the Philippines' economic growth (Rodriguez, 2002, 2010). Senator Loren Legarda presented this policy position in her sponsorship speech during the opening of the plenary deliberation on 14 August 2002:

[...] our nurses deserve to be as equally competitive in a field that has gained for themselves recognition and acceptance, especially in hospitals and health-care facilities in the United States and Europe [...] They are among our overseas Filipino workers who have evolved into our modern-day heroes for the Filipino nation (Senate, 2002, p. 012).

Manuel Villar, in his sponsorship speech on 14 August 2002, concurred with this recognition of Filipino nurses as migrant workers who contribute to the Philippine economy through their remittances. He stressed that:

One of the reasons that the Philippine economy continues to thrive amidst to global recession is the valuable contribution of our OFWs. Part of this sector, hailed as the country's modern heroes, are our nurses. However, despite being the lifeblood of our hospitals, nurses remain as part of the most neglected workers [...] This unfortunate occurrence has a large number of them to seek

better opportunities overseas. Thus, we need policies to enhance their competitiveness and professionalism of Filipino nurses [...] (Senate, 2002, p. 386).

These statements portrayed the mobility of nurses as one of the most significant sources of remittances these lawmakers believe could contribute to the country's economic growth. These narratives also reinforced the bills introduced by Congressman Padilla and Rodriguez, Jr. in the House of Representatives, which acknowledged the mobility of Filipino nurses as a favorable policy approach. Further, Senator Edgardo Angara, Jr., one of the pioneers of all health bills in the Philippines and the author of the previous Nursing Act of 1991, generally conveyed in all his committee and plenary appearances that there was no domestic shortage of nurses during the enactment of the law. For him, the concern was that a shortage may occur in the future if policies on proper health resource manpower planning are not introduced in the Nursing Act:

On a per capita basis, it is said that the Philippines has one of the more favorable nurse-to-population ratio [...] Making us the number one exporter of nurses in the world [...] And so, when we have a supply of over 300,000 and a demand of 178,000, naturally we have a surplus of some 128,000 nurses [...] we ought not to be content with having surplus nurses [...] because this soon can vanish without realizing it (Senate, 2002, p. 327).

These legislators further sharpened the image of Filipino nurses as economic actors who are willing to migrate when they debated on how to improve domestic education, training and practice of the nursing profession to be more attractive to foreign employers. Expanding on this aspect, some legislators suggested a form of bilateral dialogues with key receiving countries such as the US to eliminate the identified structural barriers to the entry of Filipino nurses. Senator Aquilino Pimentel, Jr. articulated this point as follows:

Why is it that nurses being employed in the United States are made to undergo additional examinations? [...] our government should exert effort to remove this apparent unnecessary examination as far as our nurses are concerned [...] I think we should aggressively ask our CHED [Commission on Higher Education] [...] the Department of Foreign Affairs [...] I cannot understand really

why the United States should lump us together with other countries as if there is no such special relationship between the United States and the Philippines (Senate, 2002, p. 340).

On this specific matter, Senator Pimentel, Jr. explained his point about receiving countries imposing qualification standards on sending countries like the Philippines and implied that a dialogue on a possible cooperation agreement between them would contribute to eliminating these structural barriers. Our results support Cabanda's (2017) findings about the overriding viewpoint of policymakers during the deliberation process of the Nursing Act, specifically how they utilize higher education reforms in nursing as an export-promotion strategy to prepare Filipino nurses for foreign employment.

This dominant narrative of portraying Filipino nurses as economic migrants is an established storyline in the migration literature. Historically, Filipino nurses have always been considered to be one of the earliest economic migrants from the country. Certainly, dating back to the US occupation of the Philippines (1898-1946), the immigration of Filipino nurses to the US was part of the broader spectrum of the American colonial legacy that includes the introduction of the nursing profession and the opening of education and travel opportunities to the US for Filipinos (Choy, 2003). Consistently, scholars of health professional migration have viewed nurses as one of the most mobile professions (Dovlo, 2007; Kingma, 2007). These scholars have argued and demonstrated that the changing demographics and the unpopularity of the nursing profession in wealthy economies such as the US, Canada, and the UK have acted as key pull factors leading towards the out-migration of nurses from less wealthy countries such as the Philippines (Ball, 2004; Kline, 2003).

What are generally missing from these narratives are the roles that governments of sending countries play in facilitating out-migration, specifically, in the case of the Philippines, a careful consideration of the negative trade-offs of nurse emigration and the importance of Filipino families as a core reflection of certain aspects of Asian values. In the congressional deliberations, policymakers did not contextualize the effects of nurse emigration on the possible disintegration of families, particularly on the role of women in the upbringing of children. The next section reveals this general absence by exploring the extant gender narratives presented in the policymaking process and, in so doing, illustrates the overall inattentiveness of the policymakers to this very important societal concern.

6.2 The Gendered versus Gender-neutral Nature of Filipino Nurses

In the previous section, we described the most dominant narrative behind the enactment of the Philippine Nursing Act of 2002: Filipino nurses are key economic migrants. While policymakers viewed them as modern-day heroes through their remittance contributions to the economy, they were generally non-vocal about the significant issues concerning the gender aspect of the nursing profession and the role of women in the family, with particular attention to the effects on the family members left behind.

Although there is a growing interest on nursing among men in the Philippines, women constitute the majority of entrants into the nursing sector; women represent an estimated 95% of the total registered Filipino nurses (see Institute of Health Policy and Development Studies, 2005). By promoting their role as economic migrants through policy, these very policymakers appear to pitch economic objectives against core societal and familial values. Women in the nursing profession must reconcile this tension between the fulfillment of economic goals through emigration and the fulfillment of family expectations (as daughter, sister, wife, or mother). Although there are certainly overlaps between these two sets of demands, in this section we highlight the neglected dimension often linked to Asian values by revealing the policymakers' implicit non-feminized depiction of Filipino nurses, which ultimately conveyed a tension between the gendered and gender-neutral dimensions of this profession during the policy discussions.

In the enactment of the Nursing Act, the gender dimension of Filipino nurses is almost non-existent in the policy discussions. When there were references to the gender dimension of Filipino nurses, the lawmakers did not make this aspect a centerfold of their policy narratives. Most of the narratives that did convey any gender dimension were based on the policymakers' personal experiences rather than more general concerns about the gendering nature of the profession, but these references did not receive any policy attention when it came to designing emigration policies.

For instance, the most important reference to nurses as a non-feminized profession came from Senator Edgardo Angara, Jr. the author of the previous Philippine Nursing Act of 1991. In his Committee hearing appearance on 02 August 2002, Senator Angara introduced himself as someone who was born in a family of nurses with personal reference to his parents as pro-

fessional nurses. He utilized this personal statement to justify his support for the passage of the law and to promote the competitive edge of migrant Filipino nurses in terms of nursing care:

Ako po'y talagang galing sa mga nurses sapagkat ang tatay at nanay ko ay nurse [I came from the family of nurses since my father and mother are nurses] (Senate, 2002, p. 004).

Now, the trend as I understand globally, is more of these western countries but including Japan, to look to us for nursing care. Because fortunately, our nurses are so well-known for their TLC—tender loving care and this is a world reputation [...] of course, we cannot prevent our bright young men and women from migrating [...] (Senate, 2002, p. 004).

In contrast, by analyzing further the broader context of his speech, particularly his reference to Filipino nurses who extend the famous “TLC—tender loving care” as a form of caring, we find a more feminized representation of the nursing profession. The adjectives “tender” and “loving” prefacing “care” are defining characteristics of nurses that are often associated with motherly care (Allan, 2001; Baylis, Borgerson, Hoffmaster, & Sherwin, 2011). While conjuring up this motherly image, Senator Angara and other members of the legislation did not elaborate on this gender dimension and certainly not on the implications of nurse emigration on family members who are left behind.

Subsequently, during the policy discussions, the policymakers referenced “mothers” or “motherly care” to describe nurses as a woman’s occupation. For example, in her proposal to strengthen the registry of Filipino nurses to know if they are actively serving in the Philippines or abroad, Ms. Vilma V. Paner, a resource person from the Department of Health (DOH), referred to nurses as housewives or women engaged in entrepreneurial activities instead of practicing the nursing profession:

[...] we would like other information in terms of tracking down the nurses where they are now, if they are in active practice [...] Because others may have delegated themselves to become full housewife or indulge in business (Senate, 2002, p. 23).

Like Senator Angara, Ms. Paner did not move forward to discuss the effects of nurse emigration in the absence of “mothers” who decide to move abroad and work; instead she concentrated on how the DOH can establish a good registry system on the mobility of Filipino nurses. Consistently, Senator Loren Legarda also conveyed her personal support to the Nursing Act with reference to nurses as a female profession based on her experience with her aunt who personally cared for her when she was growing up:

[...] nurses have played a special part or role in my life because my aunt whom I lived with in the compound where I grew up, took special care of me since birth [...] She was in fact a head nurse of Makati Medical [...] she is considered as one of the pillars of nursing profession in the country [...] (Senate, 2002, p. 011).

The personal story of Senator Legarda underscores the importance of nurses as mothers in the family, even in the structure of extended family, while balancing career growth and responsibility to family members. That is, if further examined, this motherly role has a greater implication to the broader context of nurse emigration especially in the rearing of children. This reference to nurses as mothers could be seen as an opportunity to open up discussions on the societal issues relating to the emigration of nurses, but it was not taken. In broadly linking the family (as one of the core Asian values) with migration, Asis (2000, p. 262-263) identifies “breakup or estrangement of families, the adverse consequences of children growing up in the absence of fathers, mothers, or both” as the primary concerns of migration. But she added that the changes in the family as an institution is crucial with female migration because “women’s role are much more closely woven to family life” (Asis, 2000, p. 263).

While the weight of the policy discussions centered on economic gain, the importance of family coherence and the role of women in the family pose serious implications on the family left-behind when nurses (mothers) work abroad.

7. Conclusion: Implications of the policy design of the Nursing Act to understanding Asian values

In this chapter, we set out to address whether policymakers in Asia took into consideration the importance of Asian values in policy deliberation and practices in designing policy interventions. Specifically, we focused on the notion of family as the central pillar that distinguishes Asian values from the “West.” In the key aspect of family life, especially the role of women, extant literature has shown that some major sending countries in Southeast Asia have turned a deaf ear or sometimes even operate against family cohesion. These countries ignore the social consequences attached to the migration of women in favor of the economic value of remittances despite an alarming trend in the negative effects on family coherence and the childrearing process (Parreñas, 2001; 2005). While international migration serves as a critical issue within the region for the past several decades, predominantly, “family issues continued to be viewed as if international migration were not taking place” (Asis, 2000, p. 256). Put simply, in Asia there is an overall absence of aligning migration policies within the backdrop of the family and specifically on the role of women (Asis, 2000).

Taking the case of the 2002 Nursing Act of the Philippines, we showed that it was an example where we can visibly observe the strong image of neoliberal policies, reflecting a supposed “Western” economic order. While the Nursing Act was framed as a reform of the higher education sector and the professional practices of Filipino nurses, a closer look at the deliberation process revealed another policy approach: the Nursing Act sought to prepare these nurses through higher education reform for foreign employment so as to further promote remittance-led economic growth (see also Cabanda, 2017).

In the policy narratives we identified, we observed that any existing tensions between the centrality of family (as part of Asian values) and labor market policies in the Philippines were absent in the eyes of the policymakers. Indeed, during the policy discussions, the policymakers strongly emphasized the economic gains for the country by projecting Filipino nurses as primary sources of foreign remittance.

While Eng & Blake (1998) explained that policy sensitivity of the governments in Southeast Asia is greater when the vulnerability of family life is at stake as a core value of Asian values, this was not the case in the deliberation process we analyzed. The Philippine lawmakers remained surprisingly silent throughout the enactment process about the negative effects that

emigration of nurses may have on general family life. When references were made to nurses, nursing, and family life, they were mainly positive and glowing. Consequently, we conclude that policymakers in the Philippines generally do not acknowledge nursing as a highly feminized profession nor the export of nurses as potentially disruptive to family life. This is surprising given how frequently migration scholars have singled out nurse mobility as a migration stream composed mainly of females (see Choy, 2003; Yeates, 2009). This allowed us to conclude that there is a disconnect between Asian values and the design of migration policy in the Philippines.

By aggressively advancing a generally neoliberal economic agenda through the Nursing Act, policymakers in the Philippines have ushered in the transformation of female labor as a form of exportable commodity. Indeed, some Southeast Asian countries like the Philippines capitalizes on the production of feminized labor for foreign employment as a primary strategy to achieve economic development (Parreñas, 2001; 2005; 2007; Yeates, 2009). While we focused on the nursing sector in this chapter, this tendency is also observable in the well-established labor export industry of domestic helpers from the Philippines. Indeed, this neoliberal agenda is noticeable in several Southeast Asia countries—such as Vietnam, Indonesia, and Myanmar—that have ventured into the female migrant worker industry. What is remarkable is that this trend is taking place against the assumed centrality of the family in the context of Asian governance, which remains far less visible in comparison to the more economic-centric policymaking in the region. Our findings invite debates on how to reconcile the tensions between material versus normative considerations in the migration-related policymaking process, which is especially pertinent in an era of sustained emigration from the Global South.

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Table 1. Key Legislations for Nursing Education and Practice in the Philippines

Legislation Numbers	Description
Public Act 2808 of 1919	Creation of Board of Examiners for Nurses
Republic Act No. 877 of 1953	Philippine Nursing Law
Republic Act No. 4704 of 1966	Amendment to Republic Act No. 877- Creation of Board of Nursing
Republic Act No. 7164 of 1991	Philippine Nursing Act of 1991
Republic Act No. 9173	Philippine Nursing Act of 2001

Source: Various policy documents

Annex 1. Codebook in analyzing legislative documents

Major Codes	Sub-codes	Definition
Nurse as economic migrants	Motivations for nurses' emigration	Pertains to nurses who work in foreign countries
	– high unemployment, underemployment, low salary, neglected workers, better opportunities overseas	
	Domestic demand and supply of nurses in the Philippines	– surplus, shortage of nurses in local hospitals, exporter of nurses
	International demand and supply of nurses	– surplus, shortage of nurses in foreign countries, nurses employed in foreign countries, foreign recruitment of Filipino nurses
	Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs)	– modern heroes, lifeblood of the economy
Gender Dimension of Nurses	Both male and female	– parents, mother and father, men and women
	Female	– mother, aunt, housewife