



International Migration and Stereotype Formation: Indonesian Migrants in Hong Kong

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Abstract

This article analyses the impact of international migration on the formation and maintenance of stereotypes about the ethnic and national identities of migrant workers. It demonstrates that the employment conditions of Indonesian domestic workers in Hong Kong encourage certain types of behaviour, which in turn contribute to the processes of stereotype formation and maintenance about them in the host society. Intergroup contact theory predicts that even superficial interaction should disconfirm existing stereotypes, but this article shows how the ‘context of reception’ in host societies prevents this from happening through its creation of sub-optimal conditions, such as unequal power relationships.

Keywords Stereotype · Intergroup contact · Migrant workers · Labour disputes · Hong Kong

In June 2014, a foreign domestic worker from Indonesia sued her former employer at the Hong Kong Labour Tribunal, arguing that he terminated their employment contract without giving her the legally required 1 month’s notice. Dismissal without notice is a serious disciplinary action that as far as the law is concerned is only permissible if workers commit very serious misconduct or fail to improve after the employer’s repeated warnings. Ultimately, the Labour Tribunal ruled in the migrant worker’s favour, instructing the employer to compensate her by paying the equivalent of 1 month’s wages (HKD 4010 or USD 515) as required by law. The Labour Tribunal was not satisfied that the employer could prove that he could legally dismiss her without notice. This outcome is rare, as the Tribunal judges generally side with employers. But the hearing was not exceptional in how it showcased how stereotypes about the ethnicity and nationality of migrant workers commonly feature in legal

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