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Internationalizing Reproductive Labor in a Super Aged Society?
Japan's New Immigration Policy and Its Implications for Care Work

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Known for its rapid ageing population, Japan is said to reach the stage of a "super aged society" by 2010, when one in five of its citizens will be over 65 years old. With this backdrop, the agreement in principle reached between Japan and the Philippines in November 2004 for the major elements of Economic Partnership Agreement (JPEPA) allows "Filipino candidates for qualified nurses and certified careworkers" to work in Japan while preparing for national licences. This agreement, along with the Third Basic Plan for Immigration Control (March 2005), brings in a considerable change in the Japanese immigration policy as it formally acknowledges for the first time the introduction of foreign labor for two major professions pertaining to reproductive labor.

This new policy came as a welcome change for the Philippines, where, in the recent years, there has been a mounting expectation that Japan would open up its care workers' market. Induced by the Canadian Live-in Caregiver Program, training and recruiting of caregivers has created a new industry in the country particularly since the late 1990's, resulting in some 700 training programs (2004), with 50,000 graduating annually.

Based on a collaborative research on the international division of reproductive labor in Asia, this paper aims to explore some of the implications of this new immigration policy for care labor in Japan, particularly in connection to its gender dimension. The introduction of long term care insurance implemented in 2000 seeks to promote the social recognition of "care labor" hitherto considered as family matters. However, when viewed from a gender standpoint, the "new Japanese model of welfare society" retains a striking commonality with the old family welfare model, as it continues to depend on women's labor, now massively drawn into the labor market as "home helpers" or as volunteer workers. The paper hopes to provide some speculative discussions on the place Filipino caregivers would take in this highly feminized and casualized labor market.