

# The Ayi is ‘*under the table*’

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**Abstract:** In the summer of 2016, I was introduced to the women who carry the burden of China’s foreign relations on their shoulders, that is, providing care services while employers attended to the strenuous realities of expatriate life in Beijing, China. What stood out to me was the network that existed among these nannies and the issues they discussed daily that they experienced on the job. Here, I realized that the period that they took the children out to play and unwind, was as much therapy for them, as well as the children. During these visits, I learnt of a foreigner working illegally as an *ayi*. I decided to probe and used this as a basis for a study through narration, as existing reports show that foreigners of African ethnic group do not usually source employment in this area. Instead, this exclusively a practice of Asian women in Mainland China. By way of using observation, journal entries and interviews, I was taken into the informal economy of China to see how foreigners illegally worked. What has unearthed from this case, is that the Universities seem to hold a surplus labour in China and the care industry seems to be benefitting. Additionally, this case shows that having international students is one way in which China is contributing to poverty reduction in developing countries at a household level. Thus, this is a phenomenon in China that demands extensive studying in terms of how international students cope in Beijing China, as well as what avenues are available to them for assistance in moments of financial constraints.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

As China’s economy continues to spin, immigration is one issue that the Middle Kingdom has had to deal with. While the “Three Illegals” or *San Fei* (Entering, staying and working illegally in China).has been established, investigative pieces and advertisements suggest people are still risk illegal employment. The current Administration Law allots 15days of detention and a maximum of 10,000yuan to anyone caught working illegally in China (Boehler, 2013). This however is not in itself a deterrent as seen in the sentiments echoed by one Zhu Lieyu, a deputy in the National People’s Congress. According to Zhu, the immigration laws are not as strictly enforced and should by right attract a harsher penalty than they do now. He even went as far as to assert that fines alone will not do the job and calls for something stricter to be put in place (Jie and Xuezheng, 2016)

Several ayi-employer investigative pieces are done in local and international magazines highlighting the good, in between and unpredictable lives of nannies or housekeepers. The bad lived experiences of this occupation are commonly reported. For example, the *Shanghai Daily* on December 15, 2013 brought an article on the experiences of ayis. Here, in this Shanghai case presented, one North Korean family was adamant that their ayi goes on her knees when cleaning the floor. The Ayi thought this was inhumane, and so she left. Nonetheless, due to request, there seems to be an inflow of foreign domestic help, despite it being illegal in China. In 2013, Xiaoru wrote an article (published in the *People’s Daily Online*) that showed that Filipina ayis are being paid double the amount local ayis are being paid, as they are believed to be excellent caregivers and can teach children English. Here, he recommends that the market should be opened so that the government can protect both the employers and ayis, as local Chinese ayis perhaps need to learn from their Filipina counterparts. The article went on to mention that Filipinas are usually illegally employed on tourist visas or teaching visas. Kaufman (2003) in the *Wall Street Journal* wrote about cases of ayis working in Shanghai while encountering molestation and other types of abuse. Needless to say, some Chinese see this system as the return of the classism that Chairman Mao Zedong erased from Chinese society. So, there are divergent views on this issue, as highlighted.

### Motivation for Study

Several investigative pieces and scholarly papers such as Du and Dong (2013), Li (2017) and Hu (2010) have tried to recount the daily experiences of nannies as there has long been a belief that all women can care for children. However, as

more women step into the working world, this creates the need for women to marketize caregiving and motherhood. Hu (2010) makes quite a compelling case on showing that the caregiving industry is one industry that absorbs illegal workers, and by so doing, exploits this said group. This study aims to understand the lived experience of one international student in China who juggles studying with care giving, which goes against the grain in China in two ways: 1) Asians are known to be the persons illegally working as caregivers in China, and 2) international students who do work illegally, tend to do more “respectable kinds of employment”, such as teaching English language, entertainment promotion, on campus jobs, etc. Thus, this case demanded an exploration.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The phenomenon of illegal student worker is no phenomenon at all, but rather a trend that has been going on ever since there have been such things as exchange students. The simple truth is that many persons who migrate, in many cases simply cannot afford to make ends meet on a scholarship alone and often turn towards working illegally while studying. (James 2016). It is not only that the work itself is illegal, for example, prostitution or drug trafficking, but rather the illegality comes from the fact that they as migrants should not be employed given that the conditions of their stay are based on a student visas and not a workers' permit. The practice of hiring students illegally to do jobs occurs both in the domestic sphere as well as in the business places (Yeung 2014).

In 2011, the government of Australia did a study on illegal workers in the country, in particularly students. According to the report put forward by *Meld Magazine Australia*, many migrant students were being exploited by employers by making them work higher hours for lower wages and as such measures had to be put in place to correct this issue. The report posits that up to 100,000 migrant students were possibly working illegally in Australia. In addition to this, the report also found that illegal student work was only part of a threefold problem which also includes those who overstay their time on student visas and also those who have blatantly violated the conditions of their stay by working in the first place (Meld Magazine, 2011). Interestingly enough, this report speaks in detail about Chinese students who end up working illegally in Australia, which is the reverse of this case study where foreign students are working illegally in China. Under present Australian laws, the maximum amount of hours allowed for student workers is 20 per week, and any violation of this rule could result in the immediate termination of student visas for violators (Nyland et al 2009).

One area that seems to draw many illegal workers is that of child care. This is something that happens across cultures and countries. In one particular case in Canada, a woman who originated from the Philippines was found to be illegally working as a nanny. In her particular case, her original employers had moved to live elsewhere after having her employed for less than a year. This left her to fend for herself, working for other employers even while her work permit was no longer deemed valid. Unfortunately, for her it was only a matter of time before she was caught by the authorities and the truth was revealed which resulted in her being asked to leave the country; this was irrespective of the argument put forward by her defence lawyer which pointed out that it was sloth on the part of the immigration authorities that resulted in her immigration status not being regularized as she had earlier requested (CBC, 2009). Canada is not the only country that has an issue with Filipina nannies working illegally in the country, Kwek (2017) points out that in China, there is a similar problem as many childcare and domestic workers are trapped in China and are unable to either go home or regularize their stay in the country. As a policy, China bans the practice of hiring foreigners as domestic employees. Chinese people however have invented clever ways to circumvent the law by obtaining tourist visas instead of work visas for their employees (Yan, 2016). Junmei (2016) gives a particular case scenario of a Filipina woman who worked as a caregiver in Hong Kong for over a decade serving different families, but moved to the capital after hearing of much higher salaries being paid there. This came at a cost however, as it turns out in coming to the mainland she could no longer go home as pleased due to the fact that Hong Kong laws on this kind of worker migration was far more relaxed than the ones in Beijing. The article also points out that employers in China prefer to deal with “*Black maids*”, who are unregistered and inexperienced domestic workers and child care providers. This obviously puts the women themselves at a disadvantage as they would be in a very weak bargaining position. Another fact that the article points out is that some employers have a habit of confiscating travel documents to ensure that they have more control over the whereabouts of their employees and also to prevent them from returning home. However, it can also be seen as a form of self-preservation. Due to the fact that the contract between employer and employee is illegal, neither side is truly protected by the law, instead the penalty if found out would be immediate deportation for the employee and the employer would be subject to a fine of 20,000 yuan in mainland. This then means that any violation of the contract on the part of the employer would still be kept secret by the employee as she would have little to gain from going to the authorities (Jumei 2016).

### 3. METHODOLOGY

What started off as an interest in the social circle of Chinese ayis, turned into an interest of a foreign student working illegally as an ayi for expatriates in Beijing, China. During the periods the summer of 2017, the researcher was given an opportunity to observe selected days of this Ayi's routine. Additionally, the interviewed was asked to make diary entries daily concerning each day's highlights. Interviews were conducted and secondary data was also used. The narrative methodology was selected.

### 4. DATA ANALYSIS

Pushing the babies to the playground in their prom beaming with pride, one could easily mistake these children as belonging to this woman. She smiles with the four wheeled mode of transport, clicks the breaks and picks the foreign children out and holds each sixteen months old baby, while taking them out of the prom. Meet \*Sarah Jane(name changed on request), a 25 year old young lady, who while doing her postgraduate studies in Beijing, China on a scholarship, works as an ayi. Within the Chinese context, an Ayi is a caregiver to a family. Though Sarah Jane is illegally employed, she prides in her source of income as a student who supplements her scholarship in China, and is now able to simultaneously provide assistance to her family back home, as well as save money and cover daily living expenses in the capital city.

Sheer need was what caused Sarah Jane, a 25 year old scholarship recipient in Beijing, China to be working illegally as an ayi (Chinese name for Nanny/Babysitter).

*"...initially, I never thought I would have done this, but I opted to do this because it is hard to get a teaching job under the table due to recruiters' preference for white employees, because only they are considered native speakers of English. Additionally, I am on a scholarship. So, after I send home money for my family I have no money left so it is either I go into dancing at clubs, or I do low risk illegal employment."*

In this context, "under the table" is an expression used for illegal employment. On the subject of preference for white teachers, she added:

*"...when recruiters respond to her job application by asking for a picture, it just goes downhill thereafter, they never call back".*

A speaker of accent-free English, she adds that during her employment hunt, she considered to do jobs that were "appropriate for her".

*"...I then decided to do this job after seeing an advertisement in one of several wechat groups I am apart of...the employers seemed very hasty to hire someone as they said the current ayi went away unexpectedly. However, the boss also mentioned that this arrangement made more sense as the language barrier between them and their last ayi was only solved through wechat translation and many things were lost."*

Here, WeChat is a Chinese social media messenger application that is a popular means of communication in China. She conceded that she initially thought it would have been easy work because it was advertised as "ayi needed for two baby boys at 11RMB/hour" in one of her social media groups in which she had membership status. 11RMB is equivalent to a little under 2USD. Therefore, after careful consideration, she decided to do the job because she according to her:

*".. being a Nanny could not have been so hard, because Europeans generally care about human rights..."*

The latter she added as she is testament to the many European donor agencies in her region. She soon realized that "ayi" in China meant a house helper, not just a babysitter. She also stated that her employers urged and constantly reminded her that while on the job, she is to identify herself as a family friend ,as this is illegal labour which has penalty in China. However, they asked her to use her time during the days to teach these non English speaking babies, simple English words.

Throughout the interviews and observations, these were the key themes which emerged:

#### Not Set Job Description.

*"...when I started working, the man said if the boys are asleep, I should rest because he knows it is not easy, but as the days passed, the more I realized he expects me to keep working and not resting."*

She highlighted several examples of her resting when the boys were sleeping and he would ask her to do something and then something else. For instance:

*“...one Saturday, after a long day’s work, I sat and tried to catch my breath because I was given the entire closet to press and fold. This was after I took the kids to the park and had them playing. The husband saw me sitting and asked me to assist him in cutting up seasonings for him to prepare the dinner for the family. This was when I realized how hard weekends were, and I was forced to rearrange the agreement to work for six days as opposed to seven days, because I literally did not rest from 8AM- 6PM. I had no time to write my research nor read key theories, because the time, plus a two hour commute, was tiresome “*

### **Abuse of Power**

The interviews with Sarah Jane suggested her experience of offering her caregiving services have been one that had unambiguous abuse of power. For example, in one scenario in this job being observed, the southern side of China was experiencing heavy rains and somehow the Mrs. in the house thought that this would have had an effect on Beijing. Therefore, an offer was made for the Sarah Jane to sleep over, as Beijing was under water. Sarah opined that for face value, this was done to protect her as she may be unable to go home, but on close inspection, it was more to ensure that she was at work the next day. She never stayed over. Instead, she rejected on the grounds that she had an appointment the following day, and this was also compounded by the fact that both her and the Mrs. had already agreed that Sarah Jane would have taken the day to go to the Doctor. At this time (the day before), the Mrs. informed Sarah Jane that she has a meeting tomorrow, so she will have to come and leave work around 3PM. The Ayi was adamant that she will leave at 2PM. As her diary entry showed for the day, this was honoured, but also not honoured:

*“...because I had an appointment, I scheduled this date for the day the Mrs. said her day off in the Office. To my surprise, the day before, the Mrs. informed me that this arrangement has changed and that she will return home at 2pm to release me for appointment at 3pm – close call. When she came at 1:50pm, I still never completed washing last night’s dishes from the spaghetti dinner and picking up my employers’ underwear – all of which I never finished until 2:20pm for the 3PM visit to the doctor that closes at 5PM and had a one hour commute. So now I will have to pay a taxi 80RMB to reach on time at my expense, where as if I stayed at my home today as we agreed, I would have paid 2RMB on the bus. So, a shift of 8-2:30PM means half of my earnings for today goes into taxi fare. Despite her boss’ day off, she said she had an alleged appointment at 9am with a friend, but she did not leave until 10AM.... “*

According to Sarah Jane, there was a clear understanding one month in advance concerning this arrangement for a day off. Instead, she almost never got to do her appointment, which was health related. The interviews conducted with her suggested that this was just one such case of the employers having the ability to just have a change of mind, last minute. In relations to this topic, one other diary entry showed that it was raining immensely, and the parents decided to take the children to the hospital. With no questioning concerning the health of the ayi, she was made to follow (with no health care coverage) in the rain. She was completely soaked. In the end, the children could not take the shots because they were on other medications. No one bothered to question her after if she was sick as a result of the rain. This points to the power imbalance between both parties and how as an illegally employed person, she lacked the negotiating capacity to discuss the terms of her employment. This is in line with the development agencies’ reports on work and the vulnerability it presents to women, as policies and laws do not necessarily help these individuals as they are predominantly functioning in the illegal labour market. Linking to the abuse of power, Sarah Jane mentioned the humiliation she received sometimes, that is because of her place in the labour market. For example, she could not discuss when she received her pay. Instead, it was given to her at unplanned moments. For her, she believed that it was impolite to ask about money. She thought this was expected from professionals as these people to pay on a planned basis. For example, observations were done, it was observed that she received the month’s pay on the last day of work – after the Boss pulled out a book that he had been making notes of when she arrived at work. In one case, on the paper she arrived 8:13AM and left 6PM, here she added that there were several days that both parties arrived late from work, but no fore notice and apology are given to Sarah Jane and overtime payment. Interestingly, a contract was being drafted stating that this pay signaled the sum total of work covered during the period June 25- July 29. She signed nonetheless. Sarah Jane giggled as she questioned the strength of such a document under the illegal employment they had her in. Therefore, for the period stated except two days, she got 4,100RMB – which was more than her scholarship stipend of 3000RMB.

On the subject of negotiating power or, lack of it, she also believed that because of her perceived need, she could not state her discomfort during the work period. For instance,

*"... The husband walks around in his underpants, exposing his anus."*

She thought this was inappropriate for a non family member to witness, but she learnt to turn a blind eye to it.

But there also seemed an element of inconsideration from both parties. For example, according to Sarah Jane, the Sundays she took off, both employers convinced themselves that they are entertainment related, when according to Sarah Jane, she was so tired that she usually slept out the weekend, without even focusing on her school work.

### **Peaceful Resistance**

As James Scott wrote in his seminal book some years ago that people are always resisting, not necessarily in an organized manner, but they do resist. This was also seen here. For Sarah Jane, resisting exploitation came in the form of pretending not to see an act, which she termed "turning a blind eye" or just smartly escaping it. However, both strategies seemed to foster types of "inappropriateness" as well. According to her:

*".... sometimes at 9:30 PM my employers would message me asking for stuff they cannot locate, but I would pretend not to see the message until I wake up the next day."*

She stated an example of one evening after washing all the plate and draining them in the sink to dry and put in the cupboard at a later date, the Mr. came and placed dirty rags and soap over them. When she informed him that they were washed, he responded:

*"that's why you are to immediately dry them and place them in cupboard."*

She added that he never even apologized and quite defiantly she shared with me:

*"I did not rewash them. I dried off the dirty water and placed them in the cupboard. He has no respect."*

Other ways she passively resisted the authority, would be when the Mrs. stressed that she can cook for the whole family, but she would just cook for only three and sometimes four when the part time ayi was present. She would then clean the pots and plates before her bosses returned home. According to her, she did this because she realized that in her mind and based off initial conversations with them both, she was hired to be a nanny; however, she realized day by day that she was an all rounded housekeeper.

### **Educated Girl Sometimes, Nanny Sometimes.**

Sometimes Sarah Jane's employers relied on her university degree and modern woman values but did so selectively. For example, her bosses would gossip about other expatriate women, whom were ridiculed for coming to China to be housewives and mere baby factories. The most interesting part about this gossip was that the conversations were extensively held by the husband, who in more ways than one, thought he was a more modern man than the husbands of these women being discussed. Sarah Jane's education was also selectively utilized when her employees would use inference to communicate with her. Through this, she knows that an arrangement had changed. For example, on July 20, according to the diary entries made:

*"...came in to work today. He left a plate with one slice of bread in the kitchen. I was washing up plates from their dinner last night. I finished and started heating the bread in the microwave. I then had it in my hand. He then came in the kitchen and saw me with it and said this is my breakfast. He took it out of my hand. Here, I knew the agreement had changed. I became very careful of what I ate."*

According to her, inferences are made, and it seemed as if because she was a university student, it was hoped that she could read between the lines and apply where necessary. One such is that returning home, the man would be adamant that it is 6PM so she can go home. The inference here is that he only intends to pay for 8-6PM. In fact, Sarah Jane stated that she believed they enjoyed having CNN related discussions about international affairs, but somehow the intellectual capacity was only applicable to this period.

### **Rigorous Work Life**

In terms of her job, she stated that she did all house duties, took care of the kitchen and also the kids. But also cleaned living room in a light manner, because another ayi was hired to press and clean from 9AM-1PM once per week. She added that this lady seems to be paid at an hourly rate for the four hours. However, Sarah Jane opined that she never



seemed to be able to leave before 1PM, because there was always a lot of housework to do. Sarah added that when this woman is present, she cooks lunch for herself, this lady and the boys. Sarah Jane also shared that she enquired about the lady and her skills, to which the Mrs. responded:

*“ she loves her because she comes, works and says nothing. “*

Here, another inference is to be drawn that Sarah Jane is there to work and not be friendly. The classical argument that household helpers remain at risk of exploitation was constantly reiterated in this case presented. For example, her closing diary entry :

*“I worked from 8:30AM to 9PM. Today is my last day. I made myself very useful, I literally had no rest time. In fact, when I attempted to leave at 8PM, I was asked by the Mr. to stay until the entire house leaves. In the end, I was told to search for a missing bottle that one child lost the night before in their care. I could not find it. They were not happy.”*

### **The Playpen: A Network Ground.**

On going to the play pen, the Chinese ayis always wondered who Sarah Jane was. Here, she would give them the usual Chinese rehearsal:

*“I am a family friend, visiting for three weeks.”*

The playpen, bustling with children crying, babies playing with toys, children jumping ,nannies speaking in both Chinese and English and two social workers , never has a moment where there is not a task to be done. During this study, based on discussions with the Chinese ayis, it can be concluded that the Chinese ayis never believed Sarah Jane. In fact, they were quite knowledgeable of Sarah Jane’s employers’ last ayi’s unemployed situation currently. They believe that Sarah Jane was doing the job of their friend. However, they remained cordial with her. Discussions with these ayis suggested that the Ayis also know that Sarah Jane’s bosses’ vacation destination this year is in Greece. This is of importance because it shows how extensively these ayis discussed their bosses’ lives in this space. When asked about the most interesting part of her job, she quickly reiterated that going to the playpen was her respite. There she met other ayis, even though she could not share solidarity with them in the struggle totally because of language, but they seemed happy to have her and seemed to have let her in the circle, as both sides minimally understood each other’s language. Here, Sarah Jane was totally unaware that these women knew that she was illegally employed. Needless to say, it seemed as if the play pen served three purposes for these Chinese ayis: the children played, they rested and they networked. In observations done, ayis would even practice their English with Sarah Jane. Many used the opportunity to learn where her country was, as they never heard about it. Therefore, the playpen of this complex was also a knowledge sharing platform for these ayis.

Very soon I realized that for these ayis, the playground became somewhat of a daily club meeting. Here, there excited to meet each other and discuss what had happened since their last meeting the day before. So, to these ayis, coming to the play pen provided a kind of therapy. Some nannies used this opportunity to reflect on their international experience, as one gave an example of knowing Canada through being an ayi for a Canadian family. Subsequently, these women were not necessarily helpless individuals. They were women who were using the little exposure they were getting to get all they can from it, and are very successful in doing so. These women pride in their international experience gained from working with expatriates.

### **Motherly Attachment to Children.**

For starters, there was no hesitation that Sarah Jane connected with these children. For example, the ayi of a Guinean-Russian child disciplined her at the playpen once and Sarah complained about the harsh disciplinary action that the ayi took in disciplining the child. She said in her agreement with her bosses, she was told not to discipline the children. In fact, on one of the days for observation, Sarah Jane was seen falling asleep with one of the babies on her upper body while the other child fell asleep beside her. When eating food, she pushed some in their mouths just as mothers do with their children and when she took them to the park, she played with them, as opposed to other caregivers who used this for free time or networking. In fact, in one example stated, when one of the babies had a bad cough, she suggested to the mother that this could be as a result of the dairy intake. She even went home the night and searched online for remedies to cure this bad cough naturally. This case also highlights the issue of culturally accepted ways to grow children, because in this case highlighted, the Mrs. continued giving the children milk at nights because they would cry if they did not receive it. However, Sarah Jane believed that as the children’s mother, she had a responsibility to always protect them, even if it seemed harsh.

When the Mrs. was being asked about the former ayi, Sarah Jane was told that she had to be cut regardless of how her children loved her because she cannot work on weekends and if she needs to go shopping or hang out, she does not want to be burdened with kids. Therefore, it was Sarah's view that there are moments when the Mrs. Would love to recant having children, as she sees it as something that possibly stops her social life. Moreover, Sarah Jane believes that the Mrs. just does not want the unrewarding aspects of motherhood, because even when she is home on a weekend, the ayi is expected to be there. Here, she added that he husband seemed more motherly, as she could see that he actually felt bad when he left to work in the mornings without their babies. She added that he would actually spend a minute to hug and kiss them, where as the woman only says goodbye to them and leaves regardless of crying. She added that the man actually would not leave to work if the kids were crying. When describing him, Sarah would grin and use the title "Mr. Mom" to describe him being more maternal than the wife/mother. She always however made mention of the fact that the Mrs. in this union was more of the male. When asked what she meant, she stated:

*"the Mrs. was more relaxed, more lenient, and would even allow her to leave work early – not the man..."*

### **Humiliation**

The diary entry for July 1,2017:

*"gave the kids cornflakes and they threw it on the ground, he theorized that it is because I filled the bowl too much. Far from the reason, the kids are just at this stage where they explore by putting things on the ground or the table to eat. We just have to be careful that these places are always clean. This I tried explaining to the man. He never listened. He literally walked off in the middle of my explanation."*

According to her, in her culture this was utter disrespect – the type done to those one has no respect for. When being asked what the most humiliating part of her job was, she dimmed her voice and stated:

*"...picking up my bosses' underwear"*

This I further discussed with her on how it made her feel as a university student. Her response was:

*"...I feel very bad and I know it is not right, but what do I do? I need the money..."*

As the study closed, when being asked how she felt about doing low waged jobs with her degree, she added that she is not the only person doing this as a student. She added that postgraduate students like her are likely to do this kind of odd job because it demands no skillset, not mentally draining and on weekends when couples want to go out to party for example, they can always hire students because they have no children and more free time because of Chinese labour laws. Chinese ayis on the other hand, are tied with their kids and families on weekends, and problems do arise from time to time which cause them to be absent from work. She added that as a result of this, students like her, remain on call when expats need to go somewhere at nights, or at last minute if the Chinese ayis cannot come. According to her, students have free time, and somehow, these expatriates more trust them because they share similarity in culture and language as opposed to the Chinese ayis. She said she does not tell her family, but they usually do not ask where her money is coming from when she sends it home to them. Therefore, this is about survival and care of family in a third world country. She justified this illegal work by saying:

*"Illegal employment is everywhere. Even the universities do it when they do not want to pay the real market value. This is just my survival in a labour market that is anti-coloured foreigners."*

When asked about being caught, she maintains that to the other ayis, she is a family friend, so for her to be caught is for the family to report her, which according to the laws, they also stand to lose and so, have nothing to gain by reporting her. However, discussions with the other ayis on the building show that they know she is an illegal ayi. In terms of vulnerabilities to exploitation, she maintains that if it is overwhelming, she has the right to walk away anytime. However, the direction of this study shows otherwise.

Women's rights still have much answers to provide, answers that link the academic with the reality in a in a very real way that offers systemic changes for women like Sarah Jane who operate on the periphery of society and are unprotected and are likely to be devoured by the capitalist framework and its swiftness to utilize lurking labour. Conventional feminism would theorize that work is the solution to the oppression of the home, but if care services to date remains heavily feminized, where does that leave the women who leave their care services for another family care services? This case also

brings to the fore how some jobs have been feminized and how women have been labourized, as was postulated by Nina Power. Additionally, it highlights the correctness of the Human Development Report 2014, The World of Work, in that, work creates new vulnerabilities for some such as Sarah Jane. If for the feminists, work outside of the home is the answer to empowerment and escaping patriarchy, in this narrative, who was the empowered woman? What about this young 25 year old who clearly has agency over herself and her body to not have children or not get married and as such, is pursuing higher education? And so, this points to the elusive nature of empowerment. At what point can it be said that a woman is empowered? Here, one woman has the financial capital to outsource this unrewarding aspect of motherhood: changing diapers, walking kids to playpen, pretending to be always happy and talking baby language etc. But how much of this empowerment is consumer driven? What does this mean for the women on the lower end of the income gap who cannot afford to have children so have none, but still confronts her minimum wage husband to be more helpful with the “unrewarding aspects of motherhood”? Would she not be empowered too?

Also, the fact that she was clear that she was a university student and they were fine hiring her without any background checks suggest that in 2016, it is still believed that all women can be caregivers. A very dangerous assumption. But here, even if the government were to open the domestic services market and laws were enacted, this young lady would still fall outside the remit of such laws, as the Chinese seem to have a methodical way of making jobs open to foreign market. While some will argue that low cost labour must not be made legal in China, the fact that it continues to exist, shows that there is a need for such. The case also shares some other non-caregiving challenges that other foreigners in China may be experiencing. Here, this student cannot be gainfully employed by teaching English language because she believes that the market is requesting white teachers. In response to this, she provides care at a cost. Also, it is seen that while English is not a criteria on the job, there are expatriates who prefer having someone speaking their language caring for their children. This case highlighted also fits in with the existing literature mentioned.

## 5. CONCLUSION

While this was a narration of a single foreign worker in China working illegally and cannot be applied to the general illegal market of care services, it gives a peak into a possible phenomenon of what kinds of illegal jobs foreign students are doing in China. In so doing, it tells how it operates and what propels a foreign student to join this market. It also addresses the relationship between people of African and European ancestry and how they relate to each other. For example, how do the two worlds collide in the foreign community in Beijing? Is it when the blacks are being offered menial waged labour by whites through illegal teaching, care services, entertainment etc? What this study has reiterated is that society still believes that just about any woman can be a caregiver, because this interviewed person was not known nor recommended, but the expatriates used her as caregiver nonetheless. This may point to the fact that when expatriates migrate, they may relax their habits concerning background checks, labour market violations etc. It also adds to what is known about the innovation that is being used in bridging the barrier between Chinese and foreigners in an employer-employee relationship: WeChat and its translation feature. This study is of value because it tells what is happening in the expatriate community from a foreigner’s perspective, not how a Chinese ayi perceives it. It also shows that more studies are needed on the network from ayis in the expatriate community, that is, what happens at the intersection of immigration laws and labour laws in Mainland China from a foreigner student’s perspective. Studies can also look at how gender informs the illegal work that is done in foreigners’ space, China.. Additionally, more studies need to be done to understand the dynamics of how international students in China sustain themselves from the stipends provided by their scholarship provider.

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