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Renegotiated Boundaries between Asian Married Women's Paid and Unpaid Work: Policy, Social Contexts, and Gender Dynamics

Valuation of domestic work: Construction of stay-at-home motherhood among elite Chinese migrants in Singapore

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Abstract

This study contributes to the literature on migration, motherhood, and work by exploring how migrant stay-at-home mothers view and interpret the values of the unpaid work that they are conducting. Using semi-structured in-depth interviews with 36 college-educated Chinese stay-at-home mothers in Singapore, we demonstrate migrant mothers' agency, efforts, and strategies in valuing domestic work and their stay-at-home mother status. Drawing on their migration status and relatively privileged educational backgrounds, elite migrant mothers re-imagine and construct values of stay-at-home motherhood by framing their role as productive workers and by linking private and public spheres. Findings demonstrate four distinctive yet related processes that shape how mothers value and validate their domestic work and current status: emphasizing the agentic nature of their work decision, framing their maternal practice as having high quality, identifying the merits of current stay-at-home motherhood experiences on their future career pathway, and constructing a shared value of domestic work with their spouses. In the end, this study highlights the importance of going beyond the separate-spheres ideology in understanding how skilled migrant mothers construct the productive meaning of their stay-at-home motherhood.

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KEYWORDS

domestic work, skilled-migrants, stay-at-home motherhood, valuation

1 | INTRODUCTION

Motherhood has been a central topic in research on female migrants. Within the research on migrant mothers,¹ the literature has contributed to our knowledge about transnational motherhood and parenting experiences of mothers with different socioeconomic statuses. Much of this line of work has focused on migrant mothers' struggles, resilience, and agency within the private spheres regarding how they overcome difficulties and mobilize resources to educate and acculturate their children (Benza & Liamputtong, 2014; Goodwin & Huppatz, 2010; Ho, 2006; Liamputtong, 2006; Manohar, 2013; Quah, 2020a; Williams Veazey, 2022).

One array of literature on migration and motherhood has focused on less-educated migrant women's challenges and strategies for transnational mothering (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997). This group of migrant mothers often includes low-skilled women who migrate without family members and whose lives are shaped by precarious employment conditions. Research on this group examines how these migrant mothers practice motherhood from afar through monetary and emotional commitment with the help of modern communication technologies (Hochschild & Ehrenreich, 2004; Kang, 2012; Madianou, 2012; Parreñas, 2004; Peng & Wong, 2013).

Another stream of literature focuses on a different socioeconomic group: highly-educated² mothers' migration, work, and parenting (Bolzani et al., 2021; Grigoleit-Richter, 2017; Kofman, 2000; Kofman & Raghuram, 2010; Purkayastha & Bircan, 2023; Yeoh & Willis, 2005). One of the main questions in this line of work is the paradox of the underemployment of skilled-migrant mothers. Scholars have found that the limited legal employment status of female migrants shapes their work decisions and practices (Al-deen & Windle, 2015; Lopez Rodriguez, 2010; Röder et al., 2018). Additionally, within this group, there are migrant mothers who migrate for the family or their children's education including those who have special visa arrangements to accompany their children studying abroad (Huang & Yeoh, 2005) and those who relocate their residences due to employment mobility of their spouses' (Elitok & Nawyn, 2023). Thus, skilled-migrant mothers often experience downward employment mobility or nonemployment and go through a process of re-domestication, re-feminization, and re-negotiation of professional ambitions due to structural realities and cultural expectations surrounding motherhood.

An underexplored area in this line of research on highly-educated migrant mothers is how mothers who became stay-at-home mothers interpret the change of their employment status and construct the meaning of domestic labor. This is unfortunate, given that college-educated migrant mothers are not only among the fastest-growing groups of highly skilled migrants but also are one of the most underemployed populations despite their high human capital (Yeoh & Willis, 2005). Additionally, scholars have highlighted how highly educated migrant women's employment trajectories are often ignored and underdocumented (Bolzani et al., 2021; Grigoleit-Richter, 2017; Kofman, 2000; Kofman & Raghuram, 2010; Purkayastha & Bircan, 2023). In this study, we use in-depth interviews of college-educated Chinese migrant mothers in Singapore to explore how mothers make sense of their world and interpret the change and continuity of their roles within the family and society.

Chinese college-educated mothers are one of the most compelling groups to explore the question of how one constructs the meaning of stay-at-home motherhood and domestic work. First, they are one of the fastest growing skilled-migrant groups. Second, several counteracting social and cultural forces shape the lives of college-educated Chinese stay-at-home mothers. On the one hand, at least in the short term, their immigration status places institutional restrictions on their ability to fully explore the job market and gain support for childcare. On the other hand, their privileged educational credentials and previous professional experiences provide them with leverage, aspiration, and scope to navigate the possibilities between their role as a mother and as a productive worker. In particular, their determination to co-reside with their children and family limits their options in the private and public spheres while

simultaneously motivating them to explore possibilities straddling and channeling the two spheres by emphasizing the distinct quality of motherhood and developing their motherhood experiences into employment potential. In so doing, they aim to optimize their children's well-being and maximize their own value within various constraints. Also, while they were born and socialized in patriarchal settings, their educational backgrounds and migration experiences have exposed them to diverse, cosmopolitan cultures. Thus, while they are constrained in their parenting and career options owing to their immigration status, their educational credentials and global migration experiences may complicate how they view the current and future status of their employment and motherhood.

In understanding and explaining the process, we theoretically use a gender perspective (Ferree, 1990, 2010) and a migrant maternal imagination (Williams Veazey, 2022). Using both perspectives, we attempt to challenge the existing frameworks for studying highly educated migrant stay-at-home mothers that implicitly assume the dichotomy of private–public and domestic–nondomestic boundaries. We rather open up an approach through which women value and validate their labor and contribution to the family through reinterpretations of what productive work means. Our study aims to show whether—if so, how—the valuation of domestic work is a contextualized process where societal and familial context shape highly educated migrant mothers' perceptions of work and domestic labor.

2 | THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 | Migration and motherhood of college-educated women

Literature on migration and motherhood has shown that skilled, transnational elite mothers are not only increasingly becoming one of the main groups of transnational elites but also an empirically substantial population for gender scholars (Yeoh & Willis, 2005). In particular, highly educated stay-at-home mothers leave their home country and the workforce, which often change their career trajectory and how they divide paid and unpaid work with their spouses. For this group of highly educated mothers who have already decided to leave the workforce in their country of origin and stay nonemployed at their destination, several salient contexts are in play. We explain two main contextual backgrounds in the following.

The first context is the complex and overlapping lines of private and public spheres due to transnational migration. Highly educated migrant mothers' expectations and experiences of workforce and family are shaped by not only their country of origin but also their country of destination. As shown in Figure 1, women are caught in multiple sphere dimensions due to geographical and societal changes. Within this context lies a contingency of the value of accumulated material and cultural resources that mothers had in their country of origin as their possessed capital may not be well transferable in the country of destination. Despite a high skill set or human capital measured by educational attainment, highly educated migrant mothers have relatively low cultural and social capital compared to their counterparts in the destination country. This is a critical context in which to understand their access to paid employment and sources of information about taking care of and educating their children.

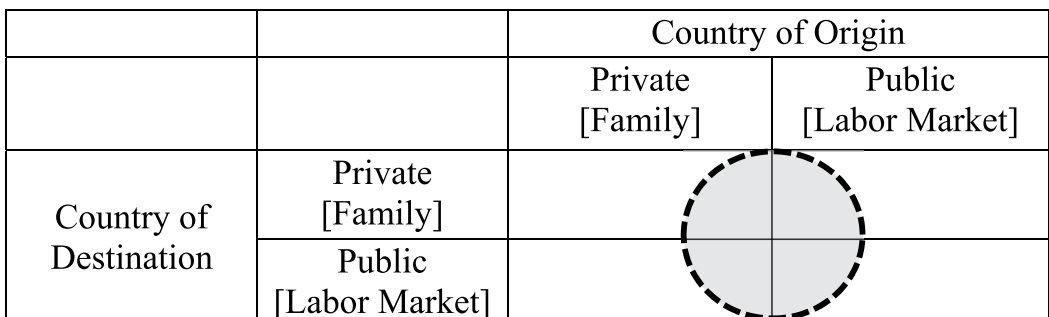


FIGURE 1 Multiple/trans-dimensional context for migrant mothers.

Another context to highlight is that for skilled migrant mothers, contradictory expectations surrounding work and mothering exist when women are expected to perform extensive mothering while ensuring they do not waste their human capital. On the one hand, intensive motherhood ideology (Hays, 1996) that is based on gender and upper-middle-class expectations may be significant as a cultural foundation to perform mothering and to make sense of the transnational decision that they and the family made. Job-related qualities are important in shaping the variations in employment decisions of highly educated mothers, but even in cases where mothers have prospected their own growth in the workforce, the social expectation to extensively invest in children's educational success overshadows a mother's own career development and personal growth (Brinton & Lee, 2016; Mu & Xie, 2016). Numerous gender scholars have shown how gendered expectations of spending copious time, energy, and skills to secure the educational success of children shape women's employment decisions (Collins, 2019; Damaske, 2011; Gilbert, 2008; Mu & Tian, 2022; Orgad, 2019; Stone, 2007). Such gendered expectations toward mothers' commitment to educating children are widely observed in middle and upper-middle-class families, including the U.S. (Hays, 1996) and East Asia (Raymo et al., 2015; Raymo et al., 2023). Upper-middle-class parenting has increasingly focused on raising children using education and nurturing to secure their success in a competitive world and to have a high-achieving and fulfilling life (Calarco, 2018; Lareau, 2011; Mu & Hu, 2023). Such a parenting style may be diverse in practice and likely be materialized in both strictly concerted educational projects for the children and meaningful companionship and parent-child interactions (Lareau, 2011). Despite the diversity, such intensive and devoted parenthood is motivated by the aspiration to raise all-around children and requires tremendous parental investments of time and energy.

On the other hand, highly educated migrant mothers may continue to be pressured to utilize their human capital and realize their educational value through paid work and thus are motivated to interpret and imagine the productive values of their roles within the private spheres. This may create a context in which mothers explore possible ways to transition between the two spheres by utilizing their human capital through motherhood or using motherhood to plan out their potential career agendas.

However, an underexplored area in this line of work is how women perceive their status, make sense of their world, and negotiate everyday gender relations and expectations. Those perceptions and negotiations are the foundation of the division of paid and unpaid labor of the highly educated migrants' family lives. To achieve appreciation and valuation of their stay-at-home motherhood, highly educated stay-at-home mothers may re-imagine their identities beyond the confines of the family, drawing on their immigration status and educational backgrounds. Given the lack of generalizability and liquidity of their domestic skills (England & Kilborne, 1990), migrant women may have to make great efforts to channel their skills and human capital across the private and public spheres. The gender dynamic within the household, mainly between the two spouses, is also open for investigation: Women may deliberately engage their husbands in domestic responsibilities within the context where women have made material and symbolic sacrifices for the family in order to migrate and stay home. Thus, valuation of stay-at-home motherhood is related to a balance between the perceived upward mobility for the whole family and downward mobility for women themselves due to isolation from the workforce. Existing evidence on how migrant mothers with high human capital value and validate their often-unpaid domestic labor is thin and inconclusive. To extend our knowledge on valuing and validating the domestic work that women conduct, we theoretically use a gender perspective by incorporating the framework of migrant maternal imaginaries.

2.2 | Theoretical framework: Understanding migrant maternal imaginary using a gender perspective

In explaining how migrant mothers interpret the value of their domestic labor, we extend Williams Veazey's (2022) concept of the migrant maternal imaginary, a framework of identity based on a mother's understanding of herself as a mother from a specific place or culture, living in a different geographical and cultural space. In navigating her role as a mother, she simultaneously draws on expectations about what mothers from her place or culture of origin should

do and what those where she now lives should do. Williams Veazey described how migrant mothers use their migrant maternal imaginary to make decisions about maternal practices and navigate the meanings and definitions of being a “good mother.” Such imaginary is particularly helpful when explaining how multiple dimensions of geographical, cultural, and temporal spaces shape women's perceived selfhood.

We complicate the idea of the migrant maternal imaginary using a gender perspective in understanding family dynamics and women's work decisions and perceptions. A gender perspective in family studies is useful in our study because it goes beyond the static, binary notion of roles and expectations based on gender and approaches family as one of several institutions where one conducts labor and where gendered meanings and relations are constructed and challenged (Albiston, 2007; Coontz, 2005; Ferree, 2010). This contrasts with functionalist assumptions about how families operate based on their internally united interests and specialization of gender roles. Such de-contextualizing and de-historicizing gender relations and role division limit our understanding of how culture and perception may change and be contested within a single family. A gender perspective sees gender as an operating force along multiple dimensions with units of analysis including the microlevel dynamics of gendered interaction and expectations (Bittman et al., 2003; Ferree, 2010).

A related stance is also found in migration scholarship, particularly studies on the negotiation of work–family boundaries. Instead of focusing on a fixed meaning of domestic versus paid work, in which migrant mothers re-domesticate or re-feminize themselves when becoming stay-at-home mothers, the scholarship approaches families and their division of roles as gender performance and struggles (Ferree, 1990). It focuses more on the construction of gender norms through creating and reproducing categories of paid work and domestic work across spatial and temporal distinctions (Otonkorpi-Lehtoranta et al., 2022). Such a gender approach rejects not only the private–public roles based on gender but also the traditional-modern and primitive–progressive dichotomy taken up in comparative studies to reveal the various reproductions, contestations, and reformulations of cultural norms that follow no single linear, evolutionary pathway (Armstrong, 2003; Wade, 2009). We follow this line of thought to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of the highly educated migrant mothers who are embedded in the complex social spaces that comprise their place of origin, place of destination, and the positionality as highly educated migrants.

3 | RESEARCH SETTING: HIGHLY EDUCATED CHINESE MIGRANT MOTHERS IN SINGAPORE

Highly educated Chinese mothers who migrated from China represent a group whose lives are shaped by a whirlpool of changes in structural and cultural opportunities and constraints. Highly educated women from China living in Singapore have been perceived as educationally achieving by their own highly aspiring parents, who expect them to thrive in their careers and, upon becoming stay-at-home mothers, to raise successful and competitive children. While some of these women become stay-at-home mothers due to difficulties in landing a satisfactory job in the place of destination and a lack of support from their extended families, Singapore's cosmopolitan and globalized cultural landscapes accommodate individualistic decisions about work and family and make stay-at-home motherhood less stigmatized and burdened. Drawing on their migration status and their relatively privileged educational backgrounds, those elite migrant mothers re-imagine and reconstruct the identity and value of stay-at-home motherhood by channeling their roles as mothers and as productive workers. In order to understand the broader societal context in which Chinese migrant mothers in Singapore make decisions and construct their own perceptions, we need to understand the context from the country of origin and of destination.

Women's Lives in the Country of Origin, China. On the one hand, Chinese women are encouraged to develop their abilities and proactively pursue upward mobility and personal success through education and career development. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Chinese Communist Party advanced multiple socialist campaigns. It enthusiastically promulgated the slogan “Women Hold up Half the Sky” (fu nv neng ding ban bian tian), contributing to the world's highest rate of female labor force participation (He & Wu, 2017; Ji et al., 2017). In

particular, well-educated women are often expected to continue their success through career development and are strongly discouraged by their parents from reverting to the role of homemaker (Hu & Mu, 2021; Mu & Tian, 2022; Wu et al., 2014). In China's mainstream media, housewives (jia ting fu nv) are negatively depicted as lacking agency and power, making little contribution to society, and being disconnected from the changing world (Li, 2018).

On the other hand, traditional families characterized by nuclear families with financially responsible husbands and domestically devoted wives continue to be commonly expected (Mu & Tian, 2022; Mu & Xie, 2014; Shen & Jiang, 2020; Tian, 2013; Xiao, 2014). Although women have achieved new status and expectations in the public sphere, gender inequality in the family has not decreased (Yu & Xie, 2011). China's engrained patriarchal traditions shape gender inequality in the division of household and childcare labor. As a way to solve the contradicting demands on both fronts, many Chinese women turn to their elderly parents or parents-in-law for help as they attempt to fill their emerging public roles while fulfilling persisting private roles (Hu & Mu, 2021; Yu & Xie, 2018).

Women's Lives in the Country of Destination, Singapore. Since the late 2000s, the emigration of China's elite populations—namely, those who are better educated or possess substantial wealth—has been rising fast, while low-skilled emigration remains stagnant. This situation has resulted in China's highly educated population having an emigration rate that is five times as high as China's overall emigration rate (Xiang, 2016). As their affluence rises, China's wealthy elites and expanding middle class are increasingly looking abroad for educational and employment possibilities for themselves and their families (Song & Liang, 2019; Xiang, 2016). Among many destinations, Chinese emigration to Singapore has also increased.

For many Chinese immigrants in Singapore, institutional, visa-related constraints make it hard to rely on the support of extended families for childcare as a sustainable and stable arrangement until they achieve a well-paid job position or permanent residency. First, although infant care is available at 6 weeks of age of the child and regular childcare is available at 18 months (Ministry of Social and Family Development, 2022), frequent sickness and other emergencies at such young ages make such care arrangements sub-optimal to many parents. Second, college-educated immigrants in Singapore are often granted an employment pass (EP) if they are employed but only EP holders with a monthly salary of at least S\$12,000³ can apply for a long-term visit pass (LTVP) for their own parents (not spouses' parents), which typically allows the parents free entry for 3 to 5 years (Ministry of Manpower, 2021). Non-employed, stay-at-home mothers, unless having attained permanent residency or citizenship, often holding a dependent pass (DP) sponsored by the husband, cannot sponsor their parents for an LTVP.

Not only due to institutional reasons but also due to cultural understanding, Chinese families in Singapore heavily depend on mothers for childcare. Despite the fact that it is relatively affordable to hire foreign domestic helpers, Chinese families still consider family members to be more trustworthy and desirable for childcare (Goh, 2009; Ho & Chiu, 2020; Short et al., 2002). For instance, those who are highly educated believe in the centrality and irreplaceability of parental involvement to ensure children's well-being and development (Tan et al., 2020).

Notably, however, Singapore is a context in which educational credentials provide a privileged position in the workforce and in the immigration administration system. Although the binarized system of immigration administration that favours skilled immigrants primarily applies to migrants who are employed, the meritocratic nature of Singapore's immigration system enables college-educated migrant mothers—despite their discontinuous employment trajectory—to seek career development much more readily compared to their counterparts with less education (Quah, 2020b; Yeoh et al., 2020). Therefore, although the migration experience often leads to downward social mobility in employment for migrant mothers (Huang & Yeoh, 2005), within the context of Singapore, the nonemployment status is often not viewed as a permanent one. Rather, due to institutional support for highly skilled migrants' employment, stay-at-home mothers who are highly educated may seek ways to re-enter the workforce.

4 | DATA AND METHODS

4.1 | Study design, data collection, and analytic approach

This study explores the decision-making processes, subjective experiences, intra- and inter-generational relationships, network building, coping strategies, parenting, and plans for the career development of Chinese stay-at-home mothers in Singapore. After receiving an IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval, recruitment took place from November 2019 to June 2021. Informants were recruited through public internet forums and email listservers as well as by word of mouth.

Singapore's cultural and immigration backgrounds, as detailed in the last section, both provide leverage to highly educated immigrants and exert constraints on migrant women. Thus, Singapore constitutes an ideal setting in which to understand the complex negotiation processes of highly-educated migrant women in their role as stay-at-home mothers. In order to identify potentially eligible stay-at-home mothers in Singapore, we combined the purposive and snowball sampling procedures. The specific inclusion criteria of informants were: (a) originally from China, (b) with at least post-secondary education, (c) with at least one child between ages 2 and 12, (d) between the ages of 25 and 55, and (e) had not worked full time for at least 3 months at the time of the interview. Informants were encouraged to inquire about friends who might be interested and were potentially eligible to participate. 36 interviews later, we discovered that the final three informants provided little to no new information for data analysis, achieving data saturation (Guest et al., 2011; Morse, 2015). Therefore, the total sample size is 36.

When potentially eligible participants were interested in the study, they contacted the research team. All in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted by the first author and two trained student research assistants and were conducted in Mandarin Chinese. Five interviews were conducted in public settings for the convenience of the informants. Due to the pandemic, the other interviews were conducted using Zoom. All interviews began with a question on how the informants felt about becoming a mother and choosing to stay at home with their children. The informants were then asked about their opinions on work, personal success, motherhood, and parenting as well as how their educational backgrounds and experiences as migrants influenced their opinions. They were also asked about their lived experiences as stay-at-home mothers. We ended the interviews with a question about their plans to return to the job market. Each interview lasted between 1 and 3 hours. All interviews were recorded with the consent of the informants. To ensure their confidentiality and privacy, all informants were given pseudonyms. Following each interview, the research team transcribed all interviews verbatim.

Lastly, we analyzed the interview data following a dynamic coding process, that is, inductive analysis (Reczek et al., 2016). First, by employing the methods described by Corbin and Strauss (2008), we opened-coded each line of the transcripts. Second, we coded and developed themes around how informants' migrant status and their educational backgrounds had constrained and enriched their options and understanding of motherhood, gender inequality, work, and personal success. Then we established categories and subcategories that are conceptually connected to the relationship between migration, education, valuation of domestic work, and stay-at-home motherhood (Guest et al., 2011). We read through the original transcripts in Chinese once again after identifying every theme to make sure that all pertinent content was covered. These themes were used to organize the qualitative results. All members of the research team are proficient in both Mandarin Chinese and English. For the purpose of reporting our findings, we translated quotations and excerpts into English. As an audit trail, we kept memos and discussion notes.

4.2 | Descriptions of the sample

A total of 36 stay-at-home mothers participated in the interviews. Informants' ages range from 32 to 53 years, a prime age range for pursuits of personal goals with regard to family establishment, education, and career development. As shown in Table 1, half of these mothers were aged between 35 and 39 years old, 13 of them were aged

TABLE 1 Demographic characteristics of informants.

Demographic characteristics	Informants (N = 36)
Age (years)	
30–34	13 (36%)
35–39	18 (50%)
40+	5 (14%)
Education	
Associate's degree ^a	4 (11%)
Bachelor's degree	24 (67%)
Master's degree	8 (22%)
Citizenship status	
Dependent Pass holder	7 (19%)
Permanent resident	23 (64%)
Citizen	6 (17%)
Husband's age (years)	
30–34	9 (25%)
35–39	12 (33%)
40+	15 (42%)
Husband's education	
Associate's degree	3 (8%)
Bachelor's degree	14 (39%)
Master's degree	10 (28%)
PhD degree	9 (25%)
Household annual income (Singapore dollars)	
50,000–90,000	6 (17%)
100,000–140,000	14 (39%)
150,000–190,000	7 (19%)
200,000+	8 (22%)
Don't know	1 (3%)
Number of children	
1	16 (44%)
2	18 (50%)
3	2 (6%)
Age of youngest child (years)	
0–2	10 (28%)
3–6	20 (56%)
7+	6 (17%)

^aAn associate's degree is an undergraduate degree awarded after a course of post-secondary study lasting 2 to 3 years.

between 30 and 34 years, and five were above 40 years old. Approximately 89% of these mothers had bachelor's or master's degrees, and only four of them had associate's degrees. 81% of informants had obtained either permanent residency or Singaporean citizenship. Their husbands' demographic profiles implied the convention of hypergamy both regarding age and education. Specifically, 25% of the husbands were aged between 30 and 34 years old, 33% were aged between 35 and 39 years old, and 42% were aged 40 years or older. For education, 39% of the husbands

had bachelor's degrees, 28% had master's degrees, and 25% had PhD degrees. Only three husbands had associate's degrees. Around 17% of informants reported an annual household income of between fifty and ninety thousand Singapore dollars, 39% were between S\$100,000 and S\$140,000, 19% were between S\$150,000 and S\$190,000, and 22% reported an annual household income higher than S\$200,000. 16 informants had only one child, 18 informants had two children, and two informants had three children. Approximately 83% of the youngest children were pre-school-aged.

5 | RESULTS

While their experiences varied, including total time living in Singapore, as well as length and prior employment types, women in our sample commonly expressed four related, yet distinctive ways of valuing their stay-at-home motherhood: emphasizing the agentic nature of their decision to stay at home, utilizing their educational and past professional credentials to highlight the high quality of their domestic work, identifying the merits of not only the labor but also the flexible schedule that they could utilize to prepare for future employment and career trajectories, and negotiating spousal commitment in parenting to further validate and construct a shared value of domestic work.

5.1 | Valuation by framing the decision to focus on domestic labor as agentic

Many women in our sample admitted to a particular imaginary of their highly educated, stay-at-home, and migrant situation. In imagining and making sense of their current situation, stay-at-home mothers in our study found it important to explain and recognize the value and worth of their unpaid, domestic labor. Our analysis reveals two primary narratives.

The first narrative centers around the idea that the deliberation behind the decision to become a stay-at-home mother signifies the value of their unpaid labor. Most informants felt confident that they could change their employment status from nonemployment to employment and that they could use their educational credentials for career opportunities and earning potential. For example, Xi, a 39-year-old with a bachelor's degree, represents this perspective: When asked if she felt insecure because her husband is the sole bread-earner, she firmly rejected the idea, saying, "Absolutely no. Because my husband and I both know if I want to work, I can find one immediately with a higher salary than him. I have that confidence." Fen, a 35-year-old with a bachelor's degree, concurred with Xi, explaining:

I used to be a teacher at a tuition school, which has a high demand in Singapore. I received a job offer just several days ago and I rejected the offer. I am very confident in my abilities. I have worked for many years and have known several potential employers who are interested in hiring me back if I want to. So, it is a matter of whether I am ready or not, that is, whether my child's daily life and study have been well taken care of.

Many informants viewed their current nonemployed status as a dynamic stage, expressing that they had concrete plans to (re)join the workforce. Their reasoning for seeking paid work in the future varied, but they did not devalue their current responsibilities. For instance, Tingting, a 32-year-old with a bachelor's degree, shared her plan to become an employed mother because she disliked her financial insecurity and being dependent on her husband. She explains, "At the beginning of stay-at-home motherhood, particularly after my child started to go to childcare, I felt free as a bird... But time passed, and I grew dissatisfied with a life like this. I felt that all this lifestyle is sponsored by my husband. This sponsorship is not stable enough."

Additionally, in explaining their agency in opting to be stay-at-home mothers, these women emphasized their migration from China to Singapore. Migration gave them more agency to choose to stay at home. Almost all

informants admitted that if they lived in China, they would not choose to stay at home because of having access to extensive social networks to balance family and work. Many also mentioned the greater social pressures they would face to be stay-at-home mothers if they lived in China, particularly given their educational backgrounds. In their explanations, some mothers elaborated how the geographical distance facilitated by migration became a buffer against conflicts fueled by their parents' persistent aspirations for their life success and against social pressures that oppose exploring possible lifestyles through stay-at-home motherhood.

The second primary agency-based narrative involves distinction-making processes. Several informants made distinctions and comparisons between themselves and less-educated stay-at-home mothers or old stereotypical images of stay-at-home mothers. Both distinction-makings are strongly rooted in the socioeconomic privilege of the women in our sample.

Related to the first distinction, mothers often applied an agentic narrative by emphasizing their autonomy in comparison to their working-class counterparts and interpreting their current nonemployed status as a decision among alternatives. Several mothers mentioned how their educational and migration backgrounds distinguished their status as a stay-at-home mother from the conventionally negative stereotypes held by their family and friends toward their less-educated counterparts. Yiran, a 32-year-old with a master's degree, elaborated this rationale:

I used to imagine a scenario where I was not well-educated. Then I would have been miserable as a stay-at-home mother. People would think that you are a housewife because you cannot do anything else. [However,] those with a master's degree can pursue white-collar jobs, but you did not, and it is your decision. Thus, although now I am a stay-at-home mother, in the eyes of my parents-in-law it is different. They will tell others: "My daughter-in-law graduated with a master's degree from abroad." If you are well-educated, people will think you have other options. You choose to be a stay-at-home mother, and you can still go out to work in the future.

Stacy, a 37-year-old with a bachelor's degree, implies that such a narrative is based on her privileged socioeconomic background. She explained that her husband's income has been a safety cushion that shaped her decision to become a stay-at-home mother:

Then I wanted to explore what I can get out of stay-at-home motherhood. [When I made the decision,] it is mainly because of my household income. My husband has a very high income... Even if I eventually failed my explorations, it wouldn't affect our family very much.

The second distinction-making process was found in relation to how mothers compared old and new types of stay-at-home motherhood. Many informants were eager to challenge the negative stereotypes attached to stay-at-home motherhood, arguing that negative stereotypes are outdated and inaccurate assessments of new, different stay-at-home mothers. Stacy explained:

The traditional stay-at-home mothers have decreased over time. The conventionally expected stay-at-home motherhood is confined at home, where the mothers are disconnected and pushed farther and farther away from their husbands and social circles. The "new" stay-at-home motherhood can be more meaningful. You can do charity or some small business... In fact, there are many possibilities, which can enrich your life and financially contribute to the family.

To Stacy, stay-at-home motherhood is one possibility among other ways to explore life; this differs from the "old" image of stay-at-home mothers who were stuck at home:

I want to try different things before age 40... Of course, when I quit my job, the most important consideration is to accompany my child. But another important reason is that I have worked in the

same company for 13 years, and I have never really experienced the world outside and other possibilities... So, at that time I felt like challenging myself. I desired to see a different me... I wanted to find out what lifestyles can make life more colorful and exciting by being a stay-at-home mother... I did not want to follow a traditional trajectory.

In sum, the first way of valuing domestic work was highly agentic, emphasizing that the decision to stay at home and be out of the workforce was not pressured or forced. In explaining the agency and power behind deciding to focus on domestic labor, mothers highlighted the ease with which they could return to the workforce, having power to reject the social pressure to be an employed mother, and being privileged to choose unlike their less-educated and older cohort counterparts.

5.2 | Valuation of domestic labor through emphasizing high-quality-mothering

Mothers in our study highlighted the premium mothering they provided due to their experiences of global migration and their high human capital accumulated through educational and prior job experiences. They were unanimous in detailing the value of their nonemployed status by emphasizing the “global mothering” they can provide. Ying, a 46-year-old with a bachelor's degree, detailed such shared beliefs, saying, “As better educated stay-at-home mothers, we are able to use specific expertise, wisdom, and abilities to adjust.”

Although most mothers in our sample expressed their beliefs that they provided high-quality childcare and household management, they differed in how they approached childcare and their children's education. Such differences among informants resulted from varied global residential trajectories of where they traveled and stayed (including China, Singapore, and other countries, such as Australia, the UK, and the US) as well as their overall educational experiences.

Some informants advocated strongly for intensive parenting, which requires copious time and energy to ensure children's development and educational success. These mothers encounter richer varieties of educational resources and systems, owing to both their more established socioeconomic resources and Singapore's cosmopolitan and diverse educational options. Many informants mentioned their careful navigation of educational resources and finely tuned study and development plans for their children. For example, Mary, a 39-year-old with a bachelor's degree, detailed how she had crafted plans for different stages of her children's development:

Before joining primary school at a local school, we sent the children to international schools when they were little. The atmosphere was relaxing, and the children could focus on play. They could learn by playing and built their personalities, which made them resilient against difficulties in the future... We heard from friends about a kindergarten which is famous for academically preparing preschoolers for primary school. We went for a trial class and quit after 20 minutes. We will not send them there even if it is for free. It is essentially teaching Primary 1 materials. Instead, we sent our daughter to an international preschool. At the international school, she learned about insects, leaves, four seasons, and did handcrafts, that is what little children should be doing. Children should not be so burdened at such young ages.

Besides refined developmental plans that were carefully tailored according to their children's ages, many informants made efforts to channel their educational credentials and expertise into their children's education. Ellen, a 42-year-old with a bachelor's degree, spent time and energy tutoring her children in Chinese. She explained the value of this work:

I have some friends who migrated to Oceania, the U.S., Canada... Their children gave up Chinese entirely, and they don't understand why I care about Chinese so much... Chinese is different from

English. In the beginning, it is very hard... Once you give up and lose the opportunity to learn, it is even harder to pick it up. Just like some ABCs, even though they can speak Chinese, they cannot understand the cultural essence of it, which I think is a cultural gap. I cannot accept my children with that cultural gap. I agree that eventually everyone, particularly my children's generation, will be "global citizens." Their nationalities or which passports they hold do not matter. But they must hold a sense of belonging and a cultural identity.

Not all mothers concentrated on parenting to cultivate academically successful, cosmopolitan children. Referencing the hardship they had experienced during childhood, some mothers were critical of having a hypercompetitive childhood and envisioned alternative ways of conducting childcare using their high human capital. These informants downplayed targeted and deliberate educational planning through intensive parenting. Having experienced both the competitive Asian educational systems and the relatively more *laissez-faire* educational systems in non-Asian contexts, they tilted toward mothering that focused on quality time and companionship for their children. Mothers with such a parenting approach explicitly pointed out that the educational environment in China is too competitive for children's mental health and long-term well-being. Ellen detailed her thought process:

I have always been a good student and thus I have been through all of it [the pressures and difficulties to compete]. I learned that this may not be the best way to grow up. So, I don't want to push my children through it again. I think it is okay to be just above average as long as you are happy.

Many informants argued that they use their accumulated knowledge and experiences to focus more on their children's well-being and less on their academic success, despite the fact that such nontargeted and companionship-oriented parenting practices might be considered a waste of time and human capital by their parents, relatives, and friends in China. Refuting such perceived criticism toward not using their high human capital to engage in academic-focused parenting, mothers in this group showed confidence that their educational credentials may be unconsciously translated into their children's growth and development. Xi represented such a narrative:

All my experiences and educational credentials will be reflected in my parenting ideologies and practices. I am very grateful to my years of experiences across the world, which made me realize, wow, you can raise your children this way. I remember I used to read a sign under the button of a traffic light in Germany, "Be a role model to your children, you don't need to speak much. You don't jaywalk, so your children will not." All my prior experiences are capital for the education of my children. They can totally be utilized.

Regardless of the different parenting approaches, all mothers in our sample highlighted that the value and quality of childcare depends on who is conducting the labor with what skills. This stance was found regardless of the child's age. For example, Fen believed that the period between 0 and 3 years is the most crucial stage for building a child's sense of security, and the mother's impact is enormous. Although in Singapore infant care is available at 6 weeks and regular childcare is available at 18 months, Fen cared for her child independently due to the "different quality of childcare" she was confident in providing. Another informant, Iris, who worked happily in a company for 18 years, emphasized the importance of mothers' knowledge and parenting quality when children transition to adolescence. Iris quit her job when her daughter started junior high school. She explained her rationale:

When my daughter was younger, most of the care was routinized and revolved around daily lives, which I can handle while working with the help of a maid. But after then, she is an adolescent and may become rebellious. She starts to experience mental and emotional changes and growth, for which no one else can help but me, who has lots of experience of dealing with such issues and knows her well.

Despite the variation in how to specifically approach parenting, mothers in our study emphasized that their children have received high-quality care based on their accumulated experiences of excelling in hypercompetitive, often global settings. Thus, the value of unpaid labor, particularly, of parenting rested in the mother's embodiment of high human capital and social skills.

5.3 | Valuation by approaching stay-at-home motherhood as a productive foundation for future employment

In addition to utilizing educational credentials to value and validate the quality of maternal practices, most mothers in our study described the nature of their domestic work and their current stay-at-home status as a potential asset for their future career development. They emphasized how they accumulated or enhanced human capital and developed career and employment opportunities by drawing on a combination of their educational specialties, previous work histories, and experiences of stay-at-home motherhood. We first show how mothers frame domestic work as productive labor that can be transferred to future employment. Then, we share the narrative of seeing current stay-at-home motherhood as a phase that helps to prepare for labor market success.

The first process involves mothers' explanation of how they value the labor that they conduct as a stay-at-home mother despite it being unpaid and undervalued in the formal economy. Often, they used the term "productive labor" to describe the nature of the domestic work that they conducted. Such unpaid, productive labor included physical, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of housework and childcare. For example, Mary shared how her mother changed opinions about her choice of being a stay-at-home mother due to the successful educational and development outcomes of her children:

Recently, my mother started to understand [my decision to be a stay-at-home mother]. Now she often said I and my husband take good care of our children, which my parents think is the most successful achievement in our lives. She said, you make nutritious and diverse meals for them [the children], take them to different activities, and take good care of their studies.

Additionally, mothers explained how they accumulate personal achievements and social connections by participating in voluntary and unpaid activities, such as charity work or community service. Ling, with a master's degree, voluntarily organized group purchases in her neighborhood. Despite being an informal, self-initiated group to boost quality of life among friends and acquaintances, this required effective organization to secure high-quality products and repeat transactions. To fill a structural hole in the group, Ling took responsibilities as the leader. Her work was tedious and time-consuming. The "responsibilities" not only included selecting, comparing, and contacting providers, but also required managing transaction accounts and arranging product delivery, receipt, and distribution. While other group purchase leaders did these tasks for a fee, Ling felt uncomfortable making money from friends and acquaintances and worked without pay. Yet, she still felt the work is meaningful as it provided convenience and improved the quality of life for group members. She confided that she was proud of her organizational skills and work ethics and that she was widely complimented for successfully fulfilling this responsibility:

I felt I just put in some efforts and time and achieved friendship and good moods, why don't I do it? My biggest gain from this experience is as a stay-at-home mother, my neighbors have given me a lot of endorsement. They think that I am capable, hardworking, and willing to help. These are the things I desire. I haven't received much recognition and even suffered from belittlement during my years as a stay-at-home mother. I feel that now all my confidence is from those great neighbors... So, for stay-at-home mothers, paid or unpaid, you should find ways to realize your value and build up your confidence.

The second process involves mothers' use of the relatively flexible schedules of stay-at-home motherhood to prepare for their professional lives. Despite the valuation of the work they are conducting at home for their family, most mothers approached stay-at-home motherhood as a temporary state with the default assumption of re-entering the workforce. Due to such a perception, stay-at-home motherhood was often framed as preparation for their future career. Wen represents such assumptions. A 34-year-old with a master's degree, Wen moved to Singapore after graduation as a dependent of her husband and became pregnant immediately. Given her husband's pressured promotion timelines, she decided to be a stay-at-home mother. When her first child turned 2 years old, Wen sought help from her parents and a domestic helper and returned to work. She worked through a second pregnancy and reverted to stay-at-home motherhood once the second child was born. She then considered returning to work again. She described considerations behind her employment trajectories:

Given my expertise and seniority level, it is relatively easy to land a job. Therefore, those breaks [of non-employment] may not affect my career path very much. Yet, I must go back to work. Besides the extra income, I also feel that I have studied for so many years... I want to go upward and not downward... I like the feeling to learn new things when I work. I don't want to stay at home all the time. It is also important to keep up the status of productivity. I cannot entirely cut off my career path... I have that fear in my heart... Also, the gaps between stints of work cannot be too long. They need to be of reasonable lengths with reasonable justifications.

Several mothers, thus, emphasized how they see the productive value of the current situation of being stay-at-home mothers because this provides a gap year from employment, a period to utilize for future career preparation. Such preparation included attaining certification, language training, or degree as well as engaging in part-time jobs or interim employment. For example, because of her capable home tutoring, Ellen's children excelled at Chinese in school and her home tutoring gained a good reputation. First, acquaintances came to her, followed increasingly by more parents. Now she had accumulated a stable pool of tutees. She often scheduled classes on weekend mornings when her husband was at home and her children often rose late. Mary shared similar interests in developing her expertise on effective educational planning to create a tutoring program. Yu, with a bachelor's degree from a top art school in China, eventually established a regular art workshop in her neighborhood, starting from her original goal of teaching her own children.

Given that the value of stay-at-home motherhood is not explicitly and fairly recognized as having marketable value, the interviewed mothers strive to demonstrate and "cash in" on their human capital accumulated from both previous education and employment and their experiences of stay-at-home motherhood. Ellen represents this:

I used to tell jokes about my tutoring job to my husband, "You see, just as a part-time tutor, I can already earn so much. In the future when the two children grow up and I start full-time, I can earn even more, and I will look for young hunks, haha." Just joking... More importantly, I feel this job is my hobby now. People may say your husband earns so much, why do you bother to earn? When I am teaching and with my students, I don't need to be a mother... I enjoy this aspect of my life.

Some mothers also pursue part-time jobs or interim employment to keep pace with the labor market and to accumulate work experience. Although their work experience is fragmented and may not be effectively accrued toward formal promotions, many women believe that it may boost their human capital and refresh their role as a productive worker.

In summary, many mothers in our sample saw the labor they conduct and the time they spend as stay-at-home mothers as something that is transferred not only from their experiences from the workforce and higher education but also to their future labor force participation. The motherhood stage was not a waste of time and human capital, but a phase of accumulating diverse skills and utilizing a flexible schedule to gain further workforce skills.

5.4 | Valuation and validation: A shared understanding of the value of domestic work

Besides one's own valuation and perceived productive meaning of domestic work, many women in our study explained how their spouses show a shared understanding of the importance of domestic work. Ways of demonstrating the shared understanding included explicitly talking about the value of domestic work and contributing to domestic work.

One explicit way to show the shared understanding of value was by monetizing the mother's labor so their husbands can better sympathize and appreciate the value of stay-at-home motherhood. For these families, mothers held bank accounts independently or jointly with their husbands. Through these bank accounts, mothers achieved financial autonomy to make family decisions about daily expenses, children's education, household investments, and asset purchases. An extreme case—although not found in all mothers in our sample—was Tingting. Tingting's husband arranged to have half of his salary directly deposited into her bank account each pay period. She emphasized the “ritual” nature of this arrangement as exemplifying the shared understanding of how much productive value she generates. In explaining the decision to have a regular payment to her account, Tingting said, “we agreed to have something more formal to ritualize and signify my equal contributions to the family through my domestic work.”

Additionally, beyond the couple's shared understanding of the value of domestic work, some mothers explained how husbands' colleagues also shared the valuation, especially toward raising children. Tingting explained:

In my husband's company, his colleagues, all have a consensus for this [father's involvement]. For example, during virtual conference meetings, the kids may run into the study room, talk to their daddy, or just be curious about what is happening here. All his colleagues' children have appeared in conference calls from time to time. No one thinks it is a problem... At his company, there are lots of “model daddies.”

According to our informants, husbands' migration experiences motivated the valuation of domestic work. Yiran described:

Being abroad is beneficial to my family. My husband is very devoted to childcare and household responsibilities now... He is the first to get up in the morning every day to make breakfast for us and then wake us up. When I am freshening up, he will feed or read stories to our son ...He has not always been a good father and good husband like this. He was from a rural origin. So, what he has learned from his childhood and his natal family is that men should not enter the kitchen, should not do housework, or take care of the children. But after being in those different countries, he has seen different scenarios. Wow, there are also men who would support their wives so much, men can also do housework and childcare. It is helpful. He has seen other possibilities; he has heard people discussing the difficulties faced by stay-at-home mothers. He would realize being stay-at-home mothers is challenging, and we are making lots of efforts.

In terms of behavioral ways to show the valuation of domestic work, husbands were practically and physically involved in domestic labor. Many interviewed mothers intentionally involve their husbands in childcare and housework whenever possible based on the husbands' schedules. This includes after work hours in the evenings and on weekends. When asked how much they accept the idea of stay-at-home fatherhood, almost all informants supported it as long as it is economically viable, and most were confident that their husbands would agree. However, despite the support and agreement at the personal or couple level, most informants mentioned concerns about realistically executing such an arrangement due to structural constraints and the stigmatization of stay-at-home fatherhood. A representative case is Ling, who confided that although she personally supports a gender-egalitarian arrangement within the family, she worried that stay-at-home fathers may be subjected to major social pressures, particularly in patriarchal societies, such as China. Therefore, living in Singapore is a relief if you intend to embrace the arrangement of stay-at-home fatherhood:

Stay-at-home fathers cannot be well understood. It is not about the understanding from us, but from the grandparents... It is easier in Singapore or Western countries. I have never seen stay-at-home

fathers in China. The grandparents will never allow it... You see, as a stay-at-home mother, I already experience so much pressure, I would worry more for the stay-at-home fathers' mental health.

To summarize, valuation of the domestic labor is not mutually exclusive from valuation of labor specialization among the couples based on gender. The relational valuation process described above operates at the couple level to a certain degree, a degree insufficiently high and strong to change the paid and unpaid division of spouses, as culturally shared recognition of the value of domestic labor still prevails and constrains the progress toward unconditional gender equality. Yet, as reflected by some informants' accounts, the diverse, cosmopolitan social contexts experienced through migration still provided much space toward more equal divisions of labor at the couple level.

6 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

With rising socioeconomic diversity among migrants, skilled migrant women have received increasing academic attention (Mearns, 2010; Röder et al., 2018; Rodriguez & Scurry, 2019; Yeoh & Willis, 2005). Extending this line of work, we explore how a group of college-educated, migrant stay-at-home mothers construct the productive worth and meaning of their domestic labor. In doing so, we use a gender perspective (Ferree, 1990, 2010) that goes beyond the separate spheres of understanding work, paid and unpaid, conducted by migrant mothers. The analysis of 36 semi-structured in-depth interviews with college-educated Chinese stay-at-home mothers in Singapore reveals how mothers make sense of their position as nonemployed mothers and of their everyday work that is often unpaid within the cultural and structural contexts of negative stereotypes toward stay-at-home mothers.

Narratives of valuing both domestic labor and stay-at-home motherhood center around mothers' perceptions of their agency, efforts, and strategies to link the private and the public spheres by validating the productive values of their domestic contribution oriented in their elite positionality. Mothers in our study are caught between several counteracting social and cultural forces. They were born and socialized in patriarchal traditions; yet their educational backgrounds and migration experiences have exposed them to diverse and cosmopolitan cultures. They are constrained in their parenting and career options due to their immigration status; yet their educational credentials have equipped them to overcome some social and institutional constraints and navigate possible lifestyles, such as stay-at-home motherhood, that were underexplored in their places of origins. Such counteracting social processes cultivated a migrant maternal imaginary based on which mothers in our sample proactively construct and seek the productive meaning and worth of their contribution to the family as a stay-at-home mother. They are motivated to distinguish the nature of their domestic work and nonemployed status from that of unfairly undervalued housewives by bridging their human capital and cultural capital into stay-at-home motherhood.

Specifically, the interviewed mothers used four distinct yet related strategies. First, despite the realistic constraints, the interviewed mothers unanimously emphasized the agentic nature of their decision to be a stay-at-home mother, for which they foster values and meanings that are vital and indispensable to the well-being of their children and family. Second, they closely align their educational and past professional credentials into their maternal practice to signify the importance and quality of the parenting provided by them. Third, some mothers took a prospective approach by extending and developing their motherhood experiences toward future employment potentials. Lastly, most of the interviewed mothers encourage and engage their husbands in housework and parenthood so that their husbands can fully appreciate the value of domestic work and develop a shared sense of their contributions to the family.

Thus, this study, by focusing on the mechanisms and thought-process of valuing, evaluating, and validating the work that skilled, nonemployed migrant mothers construct, moves beyond the assumption that stay-at-home-mothers will necessarily re-domesticate themselves and re-feminize the work they conduct. Rather, the space between the dichotomy of private–public and domestic–nondomestic boundaries can be fluid according to how women construct their interpretations, mobilize agency, and define their roles and contributions to the family after migration. The way

women value and validate their labor may not be through a re-domestication framework but may instead involve inventing moral and productive meanings and reinterpretations of domestic work. Those interpretations and efforts to fully validate their motherhood build the connection with the public spheres of Singapore and render them socially relevant, distinguishing them from the traditional housewives, who were negatively portrayed as isolated and disconnected with the society. Furthermore, our study emphasizes the contextualized nature of such valuation by investigating how highly educated migrant mothers view the productive value of their domestic work in their origin and destination countries, drawing on their migration processes and credentials gained from education and prior work experiences.

There are limitations to this study. Although the main goals of this paper are to articulate and establish the agentic nature and empowerment experience of a privileged group of migrant stay-at-home mothers, it would benefit from a comparative perspective to fully understand the extent of specificity and commonality of constraints and agency experienced by migrants, women, and mothers across socioeconomic status. In particular, less-educated employed migrant mothers who are in less privileged situations will extend and complicate our understanding of how migration, gender, and social class shape one's perception and valuation of stay-at-home motherhood. For studies that investigate couple dynamics of migrant families, incorporating voices and experiences of both spouses will be important. Lastly, investigating how migrant mothers with higher education go through entering, quitting, and re-entering the workforce will enrich our understanding of employment decisions of mothers. Future studies should continue investigating migrant mothers to unpack the inequality-mitigation and perpetuation mechanisms behind migration processes and patterns of gender inequalities.

Finally, although valuation is the key process of focus in this study, structural constraints are important in understanding the context in which migrant mothers make their decisions and construct the meaning of domestic work. The education- and migration-based maternal imaginaries and the re-valuated stay-at-home motherhood do not conclude that stay-at-home motherhood is entirely a chosen, preferred, or optimal option for these college-educated women. While some interviewed mothers perceived it as a way to explore possible lifestyles, many others mentioned how they passively slid into the status due to health complications following pregnancy, uncertain migration plans, lack of childcare support, and institutional constraints to obtaining a job that fits and optimizes their human capital. Moreover, several informants described their husbands as having extensive parental involvement and attributed involved fatherhood to the inclusive and diverse landscape of parenting options they witnessed in Singapore and throughout their migration experiences. However, despite support and agreement at the levels of the individual and the couple, most informants lamented that gendered parenting expectations are hard to change and have been perpetuated by the social stigma attached to stay-at-home fathers, the hypergamy convention, and labor force gender structures.

Still, this reimagining of the value of stay-at-home motherhood matters. Elite mothers' efforts to link the roles and skills of stay-at-home motherhood across the private and the public spheres prepare them to challenge and fight the undervaluation and to signify the importance of domestic work. This may open pathways for women to approach their personal goals and values straddling the identities of mother and worker and to reflect on the challenges posed by the structural constraints that reinforce gendered expectations of domestic roles.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors have no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ Although we focus mainly on first-generation migrant mothers, we acknowledge that there is a rich line of work on migration and motherhood that focuses on multiple generations of migrant families and their motherhood (Waters, 2002; Zhou, 2009).
- ² Throughout this paper, we follow conventions in the literature on migrant women and use “highly educated”, “elite”, and “highly skilled” interchangeably, referring to migrant women who received at least a tertiary education. The decision to use specific terms accords to conceptual and contextual needs. For example, we use “highly educated mothers” when generally indicating our sample’s demographic profiles, “skilled-migrant mothers” when emphasizing highly educated mothers’ employability, and “elite migrant mothers” when describing our informants’ perceived identity.
- ³ To put it in perspective, Singapore’s median gross monthly income from work among full-time employed residents was S\$4680 in 2021 (Ministry of Manpower, 2022).

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