

Filipinas in Cross-Cultural Marriage to Japanese: Moving Towards a Synthesis of Cultures

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Filipinos marrying foreigners has long been an accepted pattern within Philippine culture (Hunt and Collier 1957). Social pluralism is said to be a condition that favors cross-cultural marriages (Rafel 1954). Statistics from the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO) show that in 1999, there were 15,316 fiancées and spouses of foreign nationals registered with the CFO. The largest group (5,389) was bound for the US while the second largest group (4,545) was bound for Japan. Over the years, from 1989 to 1999 (see table 1), there was a total of 177,605 Filipinos who had registered as fiancées and spouses of foreign nationals (CFO 2000). Using the number of applicants for certificate for eligibility to marry from the Japanese Embassy in Manila, thus far there have been a total of 62,210 for the period 1988-June 2000. This makes for an average of 4,977 applications a year. The highest number of applications was in 1995 with 6,829 while the lowest was in 1988 with 3,569. Statistics from the Japan Immigration Association show that as of 1998, there were 105,308 Filipinos registered in Japan and of this, 45,619 (43.3 percent) are married to Japanese. They form the third largest group of foreigners married to Japanese, after the Brazilians and the Chinese.

DRIVING FORCES AND MOTIVATIONS

Demographic and Labor Perspectives

On the macro level, there are forces which help explain the growing number of cross-cultural marriages. For Japan it is a combination of several factors: "the 'export' of Filipino women to Japan as entertainers, the influx of Japanese who have come to the Philippines to set up branches of their companies, and the 'sex tours' conducted for Japanese tourists which reached their height in the mid-1980s" (Pazzibugan 1994). The feminization of labor

Table 1. Total Number of Filipino Fiancees/Spouses of Foreign Nationals by Year and Country of Destination, 1989–1997

Country	Fiancee	Spouse	Total	%
USA	14000	46665	60665	41.0
Japan	4156	40546	44702	30.2
Australia	6712	6413	13125	8.9
Germany	4603	1481	8084	4.1
Canada	1140	4162	5302	3.7
United Kingdom	552	1814	2366	1.6
Others	2481	13090	15571	10.5
Total	33644	114171	147815	100%
% to Total	20.6%	79.4%	100%	

migration can be seen in the shift of the profile of land-based workers from an overwhelming majority, being male, to an increasing proportion (60 percent in 1994) of newly hired workers, being female (Go 1998, Abrera-Mangahas 1998).

On the family level, Filipinas are socialized to prepare themselves for marriage and building a family. The family is the “core unit of Filipino kinship system,” where the individual is first socialized. It provides the person with “the personal security he cannot obtain elsewhere” such that “all personal consideration comes second to those of the family” (Jocano 1999, 85–86). Thus, to improve the lot of one’s family, a Filipina would go to the extent of marrying a foreigner she has hardly met. To complement this external pressure to marry, there is also the belief that marrying a foreigner is “added value.”

In the early 1970s, the mail-order marriage business was very lucrative. Through travel bureaus, pen pal clubs and individual homes, some foreigners and Filipino entrepreneurs enticed many Filipinos to find a foreigner husband (Samonte and Carlota 1989).

On an individual level, what are the reasons for marrying foreigners? Data from studies have shown that the main reasons Filipinas give are (1) for love, (2) to improve their economic situation, (3) the belief that children who have fair skin and light-colored hair and eyes are beautiful, (4) the prestige attached to going/living abroad, (5) the desire to petition for their family in the future, (6) the pressure to get married as this is the ultimate goal of many women, and (7) disappointment with Filipino boyfriend. For

those who resort to the mail-order marriage bureaus, this may be seen as a last resort. They believe that only a foreigner would accept someone who has been rejected, jilted, left behind by one's partner, or is a nonvirgin.

The foreign men have two major reasons: (1) dissatisfaction with their past marriage (or relationship with western women who are viewed as relatively independent, aggressive and assertive in contrast to the Filipina who is believed to be "affectionate, submissive, loyal and devoted, gentle, eager to serve, with a strong sense of family" (*Asiaweek*, April 1983); and (2) difficulty in finding a partner in their own country. In Japan, there are many remote or mountainous areas where the Japanese women have left and moved to the cities. The men are thus forced to find spouses from such countries as China, Korea, and the Philippines.

PROFILE OF FIANCEES AND SPOUSES

Data from the CFO between 1989–1997 provide us with a profile of Filipinos marrying foreign nationals. By major destination, the top countries are the US (41.0 percent), Japan (30.2 percent), Australia (8.9 percent), Germany (4.1 percent), Canada (3.7 percent) and the UK (1.6 percent). The rest consist of other destinations (10.5 percent) (see table 1). Most are female (91.3 percent); majority are from three major areas: Metro Manila (46.1 percent), Central Luzon (14.2 percent) and Southern Luzon (12 percent). They comprise 72 percent of the group. On the average, the Filipina fiancée/spouse is 29 years old while the foreigner husband is 10 years older than she. Prior to marriage, 91.8 percent of the Filipinas were single/never married while only 57.2 percent of their partners were single/never married. About one-third of foreign partners (32.8 percent) were either divorced or separated.

Most of the Filipinos were Catholic, educated, employed as service, clerical or sales personnel. The most common ways by which they meet are through personal introduction, at one's place of work, as a pen pal referred by a relative. In 1999, there were 127 who met their partners online. On the average, the couples had known each other for 18 months. As far as the extent of knowledge of the Filipina about the host country, it is a cause for concern that only 30.7 percent say their knowledge is sufficient and 26.4 percent have no knowledge at all. Although most plan on being a housewife (44.7 percent), there are those who plan on "sending financial support to the family" (21.8 percent) and "petition family members" (12.2 percent), decisions which usually are a source of conflict in cross-cultural marriages.

These Filipinas were asked about the perceived reasons why foreigners would marry Filipinos and answers included (1) love, (2) personal attributes, (3) exemplary domestic service, and (4) encouraged by friends.

Now how do Filipinas fare in Japan?

ADJUSTMENT AND ACCULTURATION STRATEGIES

There are two levels of acculturation. D.T. Graves (1967, 271–72, as cited in Berry and Sam 1997) coined the term *psychological acculturation* to “refer to the changes that an individual experiences as a result of being in contact with other cultures and as a result of participating in the process of acculturation that his culture or ethnic group is undergoing.” This should be differentiated from group-level acculturation which refers to change in the culture of the group. This distinction is important because “not all individuals participate to the same extent in the general acculturation being experienced by their group” (Berry and Sam 1997, 294).

Using the model of types of acculturating groups (see fig. 1), Filipinas marrying Japanese may be classified as voluntary migrants who have chosen Japan as their new home. Although they started as temporary migrants, perhaps as entertainers or even as students, they have chosen to be permanent migrants by virtue of their marriage to a Japanese.

Figure 1. Types of Acculturating Groups

Mobility	Voluntariness of Contact	
	Voluntary	Involuntary
Sedentary	Ethnocultural groups	
Migrant	Indigenous peoples	
	Immigrants	Refugees
	Sojourners	Asylum seekers

There are two issues involving acculturation strategies. These are *cultural maintenance* (to what extent are cultural identity and characteristics considered important by individuals and their maintenance strived for), and *contact and participation* (to what extent should individuals become involved in other cultural groups, or remain primarily among themselves) (Berry 1970).

When Filipinas marry Japanese, how important is the maintenance of their Filipino identity? How important is it that they become accepted by the host culture?

Using the two issues stated above, there are possible acculturation strategies. When individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and try to interact as much as possible with other cultures, in all likelihood they will choose the assimilation strategy. However, if individuals from the nondominant group hold on to their original culture and avoid interaction with others, the separation strategy is chosen. When some degree of cultural integrity is maintained simultaneous to the individual seeking to participate in the larger social network of a multicultural society, there is integration. Lastly, when there is little interest or possibility in cultural maintenance and little interest in having relations with others, then marginalization is defined.

Filipina wives in Japan choose different acculturation strategies. A number, particularly those in far-flung areas, opt to be assimilated. In many instances, their husbands do not allow them to associate with other Filipinas. Neither are they allowed to practice their religion. Their circle of acquaintance is focused on the Japanese community. One does not usually see a separationist, especially if she is living with her in-laws. Others, however, after allowing the pendulum to swing from one extreme to the other choose the middle ground and try to integrate both cultures.

Many of the Filipinas go through three phases, from the initial culture shock where they really feel their "foreign-ness" to the third phase where they are functional in the new culture and come to terms with both cultures (Samonte 1994). During the first phase, which I have termed as "*feel na feel na gaijin*" (I really feel like a foreigner), the Filipinas encounter a host of problems that have to do with language, role expectations, conflict between Philippine and Japanese customs and values, management of finances, one's identity, work possibilities, religion, discrimination and stereotypes and human relationships.

Kasuga (1991) lists the following problems encountered by Filipinas living in Tamagata. These are language problems, limited socialization with co-Filipinos or non family members, communication, particularly the use of the telephone for overseas calls, inability to practice one's religion, management of finances (which is usually done by the mother-in-law), differences in child-rearing practices, lack of moral support from the husband,

differences in communication style. The most critical of these is the difficulty with the Japanese language.

In a study done by Sasagawa et al. (n.d.) on Japanese literacy of Filipina and Korean brides in Niigata and Yamagata, of the 53 Filipinas, majority (66 percent) were dependent on their husband or family member to discuss with the doctor. Almost all (96 percent) depended on their husband to write for them the necessary papers. Out of 35 Filipinas married to Japanese who were studied by Takahashi (1998), it was found that though they could all speak Japanese, only two said they could write in Katakana and Hiragana and a few Kanji (Chinese characters).

The second phase which I call "*Nihonjinpoi*" (appearing like a Japanese) is characterized by greater facility with the language, management of finances, self-confidence and more Japanese behavior. Despite a better command of the Japanese language compared to their first few years, they still tend to code-switch. For example, an excerpt from a conversation shows the mixing of English, Japanese and Filipino words in a statement (Takahashi 1998, 85-86):

Ini-encourage nga nila ako. Gusto ko ngang mag-*yamero* (stop) sa *kaisha* (company) namin. Mas mataas daw ang salary doon sa *kaisha* nila. Pero *sukoshi* (a little) lang naman ang pagkakaiba...*i-shoshokai* (introduce) daw nila ako doon. Pero kung mag-quit naman ako, nakakahiya kay *sacho* (Boss), super-bait kasi niya sa akin. Warui (bad) naman, di ba? Ang hirap maghanap ng reason. Kung ikaw ang nasa situation ko, anong gagawin mo? Musukashi (difficult), di ba?

They are encouraging me. They want me to quit my company. They say the salary is higher in their company. But there's only a slight difference...they say they will introduce me (there). But if I quit I will be embarrassed to (face) my boss, because he's very kind to me. It would be bad, wouldn't it? It's very difficult to find a reason. If you were in my situation, what would you do? It's difficult, isn't it?

Their identity is "hambun-hambun" (half-half). As Taft (1985, 347) has noted, cultural competence acts as a mediator between identification and acculturation. And "cultural competence is usually measured by tests of

linguistic ability since this is the most obvious representation of it." These Filipinas acquire the sociocultural skills and language competence which help them negotiate the cultural avenues with greater ease, giving them confidence and bolster their self-esteem. This results in their being able to claim that they are half-Japanese.

More and more Japanese words are being integrated in daily conversations of Filipinos. A study by Que (2000) of Filipino newspapers and magazines published in Japan showed a total of 695 (421 of which were different) Japanese words. The top ten most frequently used words were: *Nihongo* (Japanese language), *kanji* (Chinese character), *gambaru* (do one's best), *gaijin* (foreigner), *yakuza* (Japanese gangster), *ijime* (bullying), *japayuki* (lit. "going to Japan," used for entertainers), *karaoke*, *kimono* (Japanese ladies' dress), and *nikkeijin* (of Japanese descent). These indicate what are salient in the lives of Filipinos in Japan: concerns about the Japanese language, about having to do one's best in a foreign country since one is a foreigner, awareness about one's "outsider" status and one's children."

The third and last phase, "*Jibun no Seikatsu*" (My own world) is an integration of both cultures, living up to the expectations of her husband's culture and teaching members of the Japanese community about the Philippines. She is involved in activities with Japanese housewives but also socializes with her Filipino friends. Although she performs Buddhist rituals, she also makes sure she follows Catholic traditions such as having her child baptized. She accepts certain realities, such as the unwillingness of some Japanese to accept foreigners. She makes the most of the situation.

Another challenge they face is having to "differentiate themselves from the stereotypes and negative images that are primarily framed by Japan's gender ideology" (Suzuki n.d.). They have to counter the Filipina image portrayed in the media which emphasizes their poverty and pitiable state such that they are forced to work in the sex trade in order to support themselves and their families. Filipinas in the third stage exert efforts to show the better side of Filipino culture by teaching community members various aspects of Filipino culture through cooking lessons, cultural presentations and the practice of certain traditions.

It should be noted, however, that not all Filipinas get to the third stage. This is the ultimate challenge, to integrate the two cultures by getting the best of both worlds.

Japanese Husband

The Japanese husband also meets considerable challenges, particularly since he is caught between the expectations of his society and the fact that he has defied the norms by marrying out of his circle. He has married a *gaijin*.

Acculturation, for him, however, is an option. Japanese husbands living in Japan may choose to completely block off the culture of his wife and insist only on the Japanese culture in their home. He may choose to speak only Japanese and not learn English, much less Filipino. He may choose not to eat Filipino food or observe Christmas or other Christian celebrations (Samonte 1986). Documentation of experiences shows that this pattern is usually the case. There are exceptions, however, particularly husbands who are more western-oriented or less bound by the norms of their society. This is easier on those who are not *chonon* (first-born male) than those who must carry their lineage. Husbands who are more willing to give the Filipino culture a place in their family and home endear themselves to their wives and their wives' families. They are even open to retiring in the Philippines (Samonte 1992). The relationship then becomes a mutually satisfying learning experience. Satake (2000) calls these husbands as "mabait" husbands who are more cross-culturally minded who dare defy the traditional Japanese norms and values. They question the patriarchal norm in Japan.

Japanese-Filipino Children

Whether they live in Japan or in the Philippines, Japanese-Filipino children must bear with the ostracism and prejudice of the larger society. In Japan, they are called "hafu" while in the Philippines, they are derogatorily referred to as "Hapon." In Japan, they are questioned because their mother does not speak Japanese fluently. In the Philippines, particularly the abandoned Japanese-Filipino children, they are asked about their absentee father or are teased about their being Japanese because of their Japanese names and features. Moreover, they are associated with Japanese cruelty during World War II. To aggravate the situation, those who are abandoned have to cope with their being poor, which relegates them to the lower ranks of society and the stigma of being children of former *Japayuki*.

The Japanese-Filipino children living in Japan usually choose the assimilation strategy. They are really more Japanese rather than a "combination." They, particularly those who are already of school age, speak Japanese fluently, observe Japanese traditions (like *shichigosan*), and eat Japanese food. Initially, they will speak some English but as they grow

older, they avoid speaking in English lest they be identified as *gaijin*. They have a strong need to belong.

On the other hand, the Japanese-Filipino children living in the Philippines are more Filipino than a "combination" of both cultures. They speak the language of their mother (be this Filipino or another Philippine language), observe Filipino customs and practices and eat Filipino food. Although they have some exposure to Japanese culture, for those who have not set foot in Japan, their Japanese heritage is as alien to them as it is to any ordinary Filipino.

There are times when these Japanese-Filipino children vacillate between the two cultures as in the case of some abandoned children who are now trying to gain recognition as Japanese nationals. On the one hand, there are economic pressures goading their mothers to have their children gain Japanese citizenship. On the other hand, these children are quite confused about their identity. Their peers call them "Hapon" but they are not recognized by their Japanese fathers as such (Samonte 1998).¹

Filipino mothers who deal constructively with the prejudice convince their children that they are not just half-half; rather they are double, having something more than children who are either pure Filipino or pure Japanese.

Other Japanese-Filipino children deal with attempts to marginalize them by asserting themselves and learning more about "the other half" of their identity.

THE CHALLENGE

Many psychologists and social scientists have underscored the value of cross-cultural training and multicultural education (Brislin and Horvath 1997; Collier 1989; Imahori and Lanigan 1989; Hannigan 1990). The experience of Peace Corps Volunteers in the Philippines has shown the "profound change in the thinking of many volunteers after they had experienced Filipino culture on a daily basis for many months" (Brislin and Horvath 1997, 300). As Szanton (1966 as cited in Brislin and Horvath 1997, 330) has noted, "the differences no longer implied inferiority. And to respect cultural differences meant first to understand them, which required one to take one's time, to empathize, to comprehend."

Japanese-Filipino families are in that strategic position to integrate both cultures and be interculturally effective. Although research has shown that it is often the case that they choose to assimilate and live up to the

expectations of the dominant culture, it has also shown attempts of Filipinas and their Japanese-Filipino children to blend both cultures. More research is needed, however, to identify the personality, process and other variables that would contribute to the successful integration of these cultures. The challenge to these families would be to individually synthesize both cultures and acquire the intercultural effectiveness that would make them citizens not only of their respective host countries but also of the other part of their identity.

In many societies, the family is still considered the basic unit. A society is said to be as stable as its basic unit. A society that refuses to accommodate diversity may invite unrest among those who are forced to assimilate. With the growing number of cross-cultural couples and their children it goes without saying that there are numerous adjustments that need to be made by both the bicultural families and their families and societies of origin. Each member is a part of an open system, where a change in one element would mean a change in the others. These members will have to discuss their own individual responses and work out ways by which they can help each other to handle these more effectively.

We have to develop an environment that nurtures and helps products of intercultural exchanges to integrate the best of both worlds. This calls, however, for openness, respect and flexibility, an expansion of one's social categories. Stereotype thinking, which promotes simple schemas, do more harm than good and stifle the creativity that comes from a merging of cultures. Just as the Japanese will have to go beyond equating Filipinas who go to Japan with being entertainers or prostitutes so, too, do Filipinos have to go beyond self-denigration by equating Filipinos with being *tamad* (lazy) and Japanese as being hardworking. Filipinos also need to learn to celebrate the good in themselves and at the same time accept differences. We also need to have a positive orientation towards the maintenance of pluralism.

This challenge is posed not only to Japanese-Filipino families but to the rest of us who are in contact with them. We help shape their behavior, just as their reality continues to challenge our own schemas, attitudes and behavior.

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