

# Filipinos Building Structures Within Japan

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Officially, he works in a *shookokai*. Masao Ihashi-san has worked there for more than twenty five years. In this job, he looks after the socially disadvantaged among commerce and industry workers in Japan, including cases of disadvantaged Filipino migrant workers.

He is not unfamiliar about the Philippines, having visited Negros Island in the Visayas earlier. Starting with labor-related problems in the 1980s, he continues to assist Filipino migrants whose problems have expanded beyond their work place to their homes in Japan.

He is considered part of the Filipino community wherever he goes. He is family. He has picked up some Filipino words, has learned to like eating *balut* with San Miguel beer. He seems to enjoy being with Filipinos, be they in trouble or not.

He recently took time off from work and flew to the Philippines with his close friend who is a religious minister. Without any clear itinerary, but trusting some unknown Filipino's

advice inside the airplane, they ended up relaxing in the restful, beautiful Visayan island of Boracay for a weekend, both their first long private rest after so many years of fighting for the rights and empowerment of the socially disadvantaged. After that long-delayed much longed for, though brief refresher break, he returned to Japan. His work, like that of his close friend, continues and remains unfinished.

Because of his long years of experience with Filipino migrants, we sought him out and asked him what he thinks is the positive contribution of Filipino migrants to Japan. Without hesitation, he quickly answered: "Bay Bridge!" And then he laughed.

We, too, laughed with him. We knew some Filipino migrant workers involved in the construction of Yokohama's Bay Bridge which they proudly refer to as "our bridge." We remember clearly what they said proudly in Filipino, as they pointed to Bay Bridge: *Amin 'yan. Gawa namin 'yan!* (That's ours. We built that!)

Upon further reflection, we realized that Ihashi-san knew deeply about the Filipino migrants who have adopted him as part of their family in Japan. He described precisely what Filipino migrants have been contributing and are continuing to contribute to Japan across the thirty or more years of their migration to this country. Filipinos have been building structures within Japan's walls.

Despite the thick walls of restrictive immigration rules and policies, despite the hardened walls of economic and cultural protectionism in Japan, Filipinos have entered, and have been building bridges, roads, offices, schools, houses, and more. Like Ihashi-san whose name coincidentally refers to a bridge and a well of water, across distant shores, across bodies of water separating the Philippines and Japan, across space and time, Filipinos have built and continue to build bridges and structures beyond the physical in Japan.

Filipino sociologist and migration scholar Maruja Asis, observed the same theme and beautifully expressed this in the following quotation to which we have made some additions (in parentheses) that, to our understanding, capture closely the totality and reality of Filipino migrants' experiences in Japan:

Through individual initiative or with the support provided by personal networks, government agencies or nongovernment organizations, Filipino migrants chip off the

blocks of (thick walls of) prejudice and discrimination to build (not only) a home (but other structures as well wherever they are including Japan) (Asis 2001).

From the accounts of Filipino migrant informants themselves, as well as those of Japanese informants involved with Filipino migrants and their lives and work within Japan, from literature review as well as from our own personal experience as a migrant within Japan, this paper pursues further the implications of this significant theme of Filipinos as builders of structures beyond their original homes, within Japan's walls.

Filipinos continue to build both physical and social structures within or despite Japan's walls that are heavily lined with rigid immigration laws and policies as well as tightly surrounded by strong negative stereotypes often based on unfounded myths and misconceptions about migrants.

With Filipino migration to Japan spanning more than thirty years now, issues of settlement, permanent residence, and even citizenship are increasingly discussed in Japan-related migration literature. Definitely, there are Filipino migrants who have become accustomed to settling permanently and have even become citizens, have built homes and communities within Japan's formidable walls.

Not all Filipino migrants in Japan, however, long to stay permanently or

to become Japanese citizens. They dream of finally settling for good in another place which they can more comfortably call home, where they can be truly free to express themselves and be reunited with the rest of their beloved family members. They, too, continue to build present foundations or steps that connect them to their future dreams of an eventual home, outside of Japan.

Such a discussion about the significance of Filipino migration to Japan may be useful for migration scholars who are intently observing what type contemporary international migration policies in Japan will take: whether, like other host countries, Japan will allow for permanent immigration settlements like the United States, Canada, and Australia; or long-term establishments like France, Sweden, and Hong Kong; or settle as guest/contract workers in places like the Middle East, Germany, and Singapore; or continue with the present primary scheme of general immigration or secondary scheme of settlement or labor of ethnic minorities or recent migrants.<sup>1</sup>

Such a discussion may also offer reflection points and direction for those involved in the challenge of engagement with official Japan about the present and future treatment of foreign migrants in Japan, Filipinos included, who come not only as workers but also as total human beings.

While narratives about Filipino workers illustrate their contribution as builders of physical infrastructures and

of certain social structures in Japan's economic, political, and religious life, it is the special contribution that Filipinos make to Japanese homes and communities that is especially focused on in this paper. As a background let us first discuss and understand the thick protectionist walls of laws and stereotypes that surround Filipino migrants in Japan.

## JAPAN'S THICK PROTECTIONIST WALLS

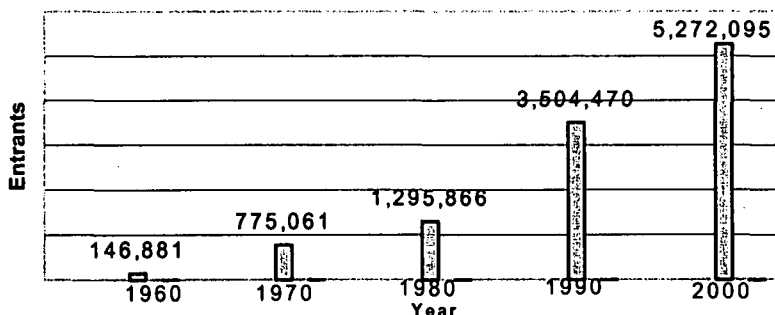
There are two views of looking at the number of foreigners who have entered Japan since 1970s. One view considers the entry of foreign nationals as an indication that Japan has ceased to be isolationist (see figure on p. 31).

The other view looks at the insignificant ratio of the foreign to Japanese population (1%) as proof that Japan continues its seclusionist policy to this day.

Japan, however, is not alone in wanting to limit the entry of migrants. Historically, host countries throughout the world have shown their share of protectionist immigration policies especially at the onset of significant foreign entry.

Underlying such policies are the so-called myths about migrants (Wickramasckera 2002). Basically these myths promote the perception that migrants end up reaping more benefits during their stay in receiving countries while conversely, the host countries end up with more costs for migrants than rewards. Migrants are

## Total Number of Foreign Entrants in Japan, 1960–2000



Source: *Annual Report of Statistics on Legal Migrants, 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000.*

often seen as one-sidedly wanting to take something from the host countries. They are perceived as taking away jobs from local workers by undercutting wages. They are seen as taking away portions of the host country's budget for public service for their welfare needs. They are perceived as security risks or even as real threats to the homogeneity of host countries.

Despite restrictive immigration policies, however, host countries, throughout the world and throughout history, have received foreign migrants and have been the beneficiary of both the negative and positive consequences of foreign migration. The continuation to the present time of policies allowing the entry of foreign migrants confirms that despite thick protectionist walls, more benefits than costs accrue to the host countries.

*Limited Openings within Japanese Immigration Walls.* There are three doors that allow foreign entry to Japan despite strict immigration policies: the front, the side, and the back doors.

Only 16 out of the 27 statuses of residence of the present Japanese Immigration Act allow front-door foreign entry and employment, which include: diplomat, official, professor, artist, religious, journalist, investor/business manager, researcher, instructor, engineer, specialist in humanities/international, legal/accounting and medical services, intracompany transferee, entertainer, and skilled labor. The front door is also opened to those related by blood or marriage to Japanese nationals: permanent residents, spouses or children of Japanese nationals, spouses or children of permanent residents, and long-term residents (mainly, the *Nikkeijin*, or those of Japanese descent).

For the side door, trainees and technical interns have been allowed to enter under a special program. More than the transfer of skills and technology that this program is supposed to promote among foreigners, analysts have called this trainee system as "disguised labor" (Komai 1995) or "a kind of rotation system for inviting cheap unskilled foreign workers" (Kondo 2002).

Data compiled in a previous study (Piquero-Ballescás 2003; Ikihata and Yu-Jose 2003) show that from 1992–1998, those allowed front- and side-door employment among the total Filipino entrants ranged from 18 to 43 percent only.

A third door, the back door, is open for irregulars who often work in small and medium businesses and industries that need cheap foreign labor. These irregulars come from those who enter Japan on nonworking visas and/or those who overstay.

Filipino tourists and temporary visitors are, by law, not authorized to work. These migrants comprised about 81 percent in 1970, 39 percent in 1980, 63 percent in 1985, 33 percent in 1991, and 25 percent in 1997 (ibid.).

Data also shows a progressive increase in the number of irregular Filipino stayers in Japan, from 23,805 in January 1990 to 41,646 in January 1998 (ibid.).

*Strong Negative Stereotypes Lining Japan's Protectionist Walls.* In 1970, at the start of the surge of Filipino migrants to Japan, Filipino males outnumbered Filipino female migrants.<sup>2</sup> About 63 percent of these entrants belonged to the age bracket of 30 years and older. Those within the 20–29 age bracket comprised about 22 percent while those 19 years old and younger, about 15 percent.

From 1980 onwards, Filipino migration to Japan became predominantly female, conspicuously young (reversed, however, in 1997), and from

1981, clearly job-specific (entertainers). Although there are Filipino women who work in factories, companies, banks, universities, research agencies, and so on, the entertainers among Filipino women migrants are more popular. Hence, Filipino migration to Japan has often been described as gender-, age-, and work-specific because of the predominance of young female Filipino entertainers.

Constituting an insignificant 3.2 percent of Filipino migrants to Japan in 1970, entertainers jumped to 30.5 percent in 1980, and by 1991, accounted for the single highest category of Filipino migrants, at 39.6 percent.

By 1990, too, those 30 years and older decreased to 31 percent from 48 percent in 1980, while those within the 20–29 age bracket increased to a high 61 percent from 42 percent in 1980. Those in the age bracket of 19 years or younger decreased from 10 percent to 8 percent during the same period.

By 1997, other major changes emerged. With the increase in the number of permanent and long-term residents, those in the 20–29 age bracket decreased to 44 percent while those 30 years and older increased to a high 52 percent. The increase was most evident within the age bracket of 50 and above. The 19 years of age and younger continued to decrease to about 3 percent.

In 1985, the number of spouses and children of Japanese rose to third

position among Filipino migrants in Japan. This new category signaled the opening of yet another front door to Filipino migrants. Conspicuous during the 1980s was the much publicized mail order bride system where community officials of some northern prefectures such as Yamagata and Akita actively pursued Filipino brides for rural farming grooms.

When authorities restricted the departure from the Philippines and the entry to Japan of entertainers as a result of the controversial death of a very young Filipino entertainer, Maricris Sioson, in 1992, observers noticed the rise in the number of spouses and children of Japanese. By 1997, this category took number one position among Filipino migrants at 30 percent while the entertainers followed at 24.4 percent and temporary visitors in third position at 25 percent.

According to Nobue Suzuki (2000), in Japan, Filipino women are referred to with the defiling label "*Japayuki* (Japan-bound) entertainers" a term considered to be equivalent to prostitutes or "brides" or more specifically, '*Firipinjin hanayome* (Filipino brides): fantasizing 'good old feminine virtue' which, in promoters' eyes, modern Japanese women have lost. These particular labels attached to Filipinas push them to the extremes of the wife/whore or "good girl/bad girl" polarity in Japan's gender scheme.

Regardless of the actual, lived experiences of immigrant Filipinas, in the Philippines in the past, and in Japan at present, Filipinas have been

subjected to a disciplining discourse within their host society (ibid., 432).

To quote more lengthily about these negative stereotypes of Filipino migrants in Japan, Suzuki writes:

Because they primarily work in bars and hotels as hostesses, singers, and dancers, Japanese, Filipinos, and others alike have commonly aligned 'Japayuki' and 'entertainers' in Japan with prostitutes in the Philippines. The continuing domination of such a pervasive prostitute image of Filipinas symbolically places all Filipinas in the time-space confinement of 'the sex industry' in the night, and outside of the home. One Filipina wife of a Japanese man related to me her encounter with a Japanese woman whose comment exemplifies this time-space containment: 'Filipinas will never survive in Japan because they know nothing but make and serve alcohol to men and they always prefer the 'night life.'"

By the mid-1980s, the Japanese circulated and consumed tales about migrant Filipina workers as newsworthy objects because they 'make good cinematic subjects with their beauty and other marketable stories like being highly educated mothers.' ....film maker Yamatani Tetsuo called Filipinas, 'a convenient public toilet' and contended that this is 'a reality of Southeast Asian women in Japan... Magazines, tabloids, and news-

papers volumi-nously disseminated allegories of the 'Japayuki' as the 'immoral.' Others, linked sex work with eroticized bodies and criminal syndicates operating in forced prostitution. Other articles focused on Filipinas have been portrayed as hostesses and whores choosing to work in the night in order to achieve their own ends, with some even depicted as deceiving their clients and intentionally becoming pregnant to bear 'Japanese' children.

As media and the general public continue to generalize Filipino migrants as poor, "working for the yen," as either Japayuki or entertainers or hanayome or brides, and as official Japan continues to strictly enforce immigration rules affecting Filipino migrants, the positive dimensions of Filipino migration are often ignored and unrecognized.

If at all, the discussion of consequences brought by foreign migrants, Filipinos included, focus solely on the economic. This is understandable as host countries simplistically and unrealistically expect that foreign migrants bring in only their labor, not their total selves with a host of needs and capacities beyond the economic.

On the whole, very little discussion has been done on the noneconomic positive contributions of foreign migrants to Japan. The same can be said of Filipino migration to Japan.

The subsequent discussion presents, from multiple sources, some actual but unrecognized positive contributions of Filipino migrants to

Japan. Doing so provides a more realistic and balanced portrayal of Filipino migrants within Japan's walls.

*Filipinos' Contributions to Japanese Society Inside Japan's Walls.* Through their narratives, literature review, and our own continuing experience as a migrant, one sees clearly that despite the strictness and the protectionism that thickly line Japan's walls, Filipino migrants have entered and have not been deterred in building structures not only for themselves and their natal families, either back in the Philippines or with them as migrants in Japan. Filipino migrants have also started and still continue to build both physical and social structures in Japan, contributing positively to Japanese society and its people.

To summarize, it is widely known that Filipinos bring to Japan their labor: both productive and reproductive. As laborers, the male migrants continue to build physical foundations (roads, bridges, buildings and houses). For their part, the female migrants as entertainers perform sex-affective services, while the domestic workers and brides provide care-taking and social maintenance through reproductive labor (Truong n.d.).

As can be gleaned from the narratives of Filipino migrants below, as well as from the subsequent discussion of the constructive structural contributions of Filipino migrants to Japan, culled from literature review, both types of Filipino migrant labor have contributed to the Japanese economy, and to political partnerships

and alliances with Japanese NGOs, certain local governments, and Japanese churches and religions. The subsequent narratives capture these specific humane, economic and non-economic, and cultural dimensions that Filipino migrants bring into Japan's walls. Ultimately, not only do they build structures out of their labor, they also build homes and communities in Japan, springing from their sense of love and commitment to family.

### A FILIPINO WORKER'S TALE

He has been here for more than ten years now. He met his wife who come to Japan to work as an entertainer. They both hail from the same province in the Philippines. Together with male neighbors from the same province, he has since worked building homes in various parts of Japan. Some of his former coworkers have long transferred to other areas (some built the Bay Bridge) while some have returned to their province for good.

When his wife got pregnant with their second child in Japan, they decided that she would be better off raising the children back in their province. For about five years, they were apart, communicating with each other through telephone calls or door-to-door service for Japanese goods that he would buy for them, especially toys for the kids.

His wife suddenly returned to Japan upon learning that he had gotten involved with a foreign entertainer. Now, they are both working. He still

continues to build homes and other buildings in various areas in Japan. His wife went back to work as an entertainer. Because the entertainment sector had become *hima* with the Japanese economic crisis, she worked in a factory during the day-time. This hectic double-work schedule, coupled with her exposure to chemicals within her day work, has caused her to be sick frequently. What she earned, she spent mostly for medical bills and medicines. She pays a lot as she and her husband do not have any health insurance.

Her night job as an entertainer also has its share of risks and dangers. Her former Japanese employer paid them lower than Y1,000 per hour, even lower or none on days when no guests would come to their *omise*. She transferred to a Filipino club-owner employer who was a former overstayer herself but who managed to finally get a permanent visa by marrying, and then later, divorcing her first Japanese husband, and then marrying a second and then again, divorcing her second Japanese husband. She owns a Filipino restaurant aside from the club and other businesses. She is said to pay her entertainer employees better than Japanese club employers.

Another risk involves driving home early in the morning, sometimes after having taken a drink or more with her customers. Her way home is through some dark, narrow roads and once, she was almost hit by a car whose driver seemed to her to be Yakuza, with his haircut and manners. She has



met some of them at several clubs that she worked for in the past. The Yakuza-looking driver shouted very foul language at her but she understood the part that accused her of being a cheap entertainer. She retaliated with some foul Japanese words that she had also learned from her customers and she quickly sped away from the early morning scene.

Her husband also thinks the constant risk lies with customers who cannot control themselves when they get drunk and who may possibly take advantage of her. So, they both decided that she transfer jobs. While the entertainer's wage was good, the risks to health and body were always there. There was also the irregularity of wage due to the sector affected by *hima*. Now, she works for a factory while he continues to do *gemba* work and builds houses and buildings.

Popular among his Filipino friends, he has been asked to lead an organization they have formed. They have joint celebrations for special occasions where they bring their families and they serve drinks and Filipino dishes. They have sports activities and help each other out in times of financial need. They also have developed deep friendships among former employers and other Japanese. When *gemba* and entertainment work are *hima*, they turn to them for alternative jobs.

Their children are at present in the care of their grandmother and are doing very well in school in the Philippines. They continue to com-

municate with them regularly through the telephone and door-to-door service. They send regular remit-tances through the Philippine National Bank or occasionally through some private couriers or through friends. The husband has bought a second-hand computer in order to install a webcam and a microphone for better communication with their children in the near future. They are not yet considering immediate return as they still have to take care of the needs of their growing children who have just started their elementary schooling.

In the meantime, they have learned to confidently live in Japan, having for their immediate neighbors a number of families often engaged in the same types of occupation.

#### A FILIPINO TRAINEE'S THREE-YEAR EXPERIENCE

*On our first year, we were paid Y70,000 per month for the same job as our Japanese counterparts. Five of us were made to stay for free in one room, with free use of utilities. We had to commute by bike to the company which was about 3 kilometers away from our residence, rain or shine or snow, spring, summer, autumn, and winter.*

*We had to provide for our own food. I found the company food still expensive at about Y320-420 so I brought my own bentoo, sometimes rice and some dish, or on many occasions, just bread and ramen. I had to save money*

*to send home to my mother and occasionally, to my girlfriend.*

*Our salary was raised to Y90,000 on our second year, and Y110,000 on our third and last year. I know that our salary may be lower than what it should rightly be but I chose to be quiet as I would not have been able to have our house rebuilt and send money home if I did not work here in Japan.*

*I had already sent by door-to-door service two boxes containing Japanese goods that I bought, like Play Station, audio-video components, and other souvenirs...I call my mother and girlfriend through my cell phone or through the use of phone cards. I contact other friends and relatives through email.*

*The company gave me a reward of Y2,500 for passing the Japanese Language National Exam...I will be going home without any cash as these had already been used up by rebuilding our home that was damaged by a storm last year. I do not have a job either waiting for me back home. I wish someone can offer me a visa soon so I can stay longer here. I have been advised by my friends to overstay but I do not want to tarnish my clean record here. According to our company, they will hire me to train future trainees in the Japanese language in our province.*

*My Japanese coworkers will surely miss me when I leave for home. Kasi lagi akong nagpapatawa (Because I always make them laugh) during*

*work. When I am silent on certain days, they start asking if I am okay, if I am sick. They tell me that my jokes and my singing make their work lighter. So when I am quiet, they turn to me and request me to make them laugh.*

*I have close friends among them who treated me to Japanese food like sukiyaki and others in Japanese restaurants. I was brought to a ski resort and they lent me all the necessary ski wear and equipment. I rode on my first ski lift and enjoyed the feeling of being able to ski. I had to brake on my speed, however, when I thought I was skiing too fast. My Japanese friends were always nearby to watch over me, however, so hindi ako natakot (I was not afraid).*

*Some of them said they will visit me in the Philippines. If I get the chance, I would like to bring them beyond my hometown and visit other beautiful places outside of Luzon. I hope the Lord will shower me with blessings upon my return to the Philippines... Sana makabalik uli ako sa Japan para magtrabaho (I wish I can go back again to work in Japan).*

As with the foregoing narratives, accounts also abound in the existing literature about the contribution of Filipino migrant labor to Japan's economy, through both the productive and reproductive work that they do in Japan.

The internationalization of the Japanese economy generated an

expansion in the supply of low wage jobs in manufacturing, industry, agriculture, and services which became available to foreign workers due to a labor shortage in Japan. This was also caused by the unattractiveness of low-waged jobs to Japanese labor and to Japan's aging population. Thus, some observers note that Filipino migrants in Japan are providing the necessary productive labor to continue building Japan's infrastructure and economy (from spare parts, buildings, houses, bridges, roads to companies and industries). They are also helping replenish Japanese workers through their reproductive labor.

Citing the case of Filipino migrant women in Japan in particular, Truong observed that Japan opted for the import of foreign brides to solve the female labor shortage in agriculture caused by the marriage crisis in the rural areas that threatened Japan's patriarchal system. In urban-industrial areas, Japan, too, has allowed the entry of entertainers for its service sector (ibid.).

Truong writes that Filipino women migrants to Japan served "in a narrow range of occupations shunned by the local female population such as entertainers in sex-affective services, as domestic workers, and as brides in care-taking and social maintenance of labor, commonly referred to as reproductive labor" (ibid.).

It has also been noted in the literature that the entry of foreign labor affects wage levels, tending to

pull these down and resulting in discriminatory and disadvantageous working conditions for migrants. Meanwhile more profits accrue to Japanese businesses and industries, and more privileges/advantages to Japanese labor. Reports abound on Filipino labor engaged in poorly paid work and without benefits compared to Japanese workers for the same type of work.<sup>3</sup>

Numerous references are also made in the literature regarding migrant remittances earned at host countries and sent for the benefit of migrant families and communities in sending countries.

It is generally accepted that the entry of foreign migrant labor affects the socioeconomic-political status of host countries, like Japan. Along with their families and communities and their sending countries, migrants strongly rely and depend on the openness of host countries to foreign labor.

Within host countries, however, negative perceptions tend to develop regarding foreign migrant labor. For one, domestic labor, is opposed to the presence of competitive foreign labor as this is seen to depress wage and to enlarge only the profits of industries and businesses. For their part, government and welfare agencies worry about the welfare costs of increased numbers of migrant (and the children born to them) requiring social services like health, education, and counseling, among others.

With foreign migrant labor replacing and competing with domestic labor in terms of employment and wage levels and with foreign migrant labor demanding benefits beyond their economic needs, there is a general prevailing (negative) view that foreign migrant labor as a sector, is one-sidedly reaping the benefits from migration.

Nothing is farther from actual reality. Because of the conventional focus only on selected economic aspects of employment (i.e., labor supply, wage levels, and remittances), other positive impacts of labor migration on the economy have not been given ample attention and consideration.

A more complete discussion of the economic dimension of migration should include a reexamination of the benefits that host countries like Japan derive from remittances, migrants' taxes, and revenues derived from migrant consumption patterns.

Remittances are conventionally viewed as conferring benefits primarily on the migrants and their families, communities, and sending countries. What is often ignored is the fact that host countries likewise reap enormous profits from remittances.

Japanese or foreign banks require bank fees for remittances that are sent directly through them to their correspondent banks in the Philippines or through them to Philippine banks based in Japan. Bank rates differ according to the amount of remittances sent (about Y104 to Y430 for

remittances of less than Y300,000 and Y210 to Y630 for remittances of Y300,000 or more).

Migrants' remittances, therefore, provide benefits to the migrants' families communities, and sending countries. Through bank fees paid on these, they also contribute to the businesses of Japanese banks and international banks based in Japan.

As Philippine banks based in Japan (which handle remittances) are considered equal to Japanese correspondent banks, they are required to pay different taxes, including income tax to the Japanese government. Since the bulk of the income of Japan-based Philippine banks come from remittances, indirectly, the Japanese government also benefits from the migrants' remittances through taxes. Philippine-based banks used by migrants for their remittances also pay for office rental space and use of various utilities. Migrants also pay for transportation and telecommunication services to send their remittances through the banking system in Japan. Hence, other Japanese sectors derive indirect economic benefits from migrants' remittances.

Japanese society also benefits from migration taxes. Taxes are automatically deducted from the salaries of migrant workers and remitted to the Japanese government. While taxes are deducted, however, not all foreign workers, including Filipino workers, are entitled to work and welfare benefits. Hence, Japanese businesses and industries as well as

the Japanese government gain from the unused, unclaimed benefits and welfare expenses that should have been provided to foreign workers at par with their Japanese counterparts. It is, therefore, not true that the host countries incur huge and extra costs used for migrants' labor and welfare needs. Migrants, through taxes deducted from their work, raise their own funds for their welfare needs.

Finally, aside from remittances and taxes, migrants directly provide the host country with economic benefits from their consumption expenditures. Migrants are not only laborers within their host countries. They are consumers as well. The expenditures that migrants incur in Japan for their needs (i.e., for food, clothing, housing, utilities, appliances, travel, communication, leisure, among others) all go to the Japanese economy and various sectors of the Japanese society. If, for example, Filipino migrants spent a conservative average of Y1,000 per day, the Japanese economy could earn about Y170 million per day from the average daily consumption of 169,755 Filipino entrants for the year 2000. (If the calculation is extended to include the total number of foreigners in Japan, even if their consumption was an unrealistic low Y100 per person per day, Japan would gain for a day, more than Y527 million from the entry of an estimated 5,272,095 foreign workers in year 2000.) Through their remittances, taxes, and consumption expenses, therefore, migrants help to maintain Japanese

workers, businesses, and industries and the Japanese economy as a whole. Through these same processes, one can argue that migrants help sustain the global system. Future research should be encouraged to capture more closely the impact of these added economic dimensions of migrant labor on Japan's economy and society, and the global system more generally.

*Migrant Workers' Contribution to Japan's Internationalization.* As official Japan and the Japanese society in general are perceived as merely paying lip service to Japan's internationalization (in reality the country continues to uphold restrictive immigration policies), two prominent sectors of Japanese society consisting of nongovernment organizations (NGOs) and some local governments "have become agents of change and participants in Japan's internationalization in the 1990s."<sup>4</sup> These two sectors continue to rise to the challenge of servicing the migrants, by bringing to the attention of proper authorities, labor and welfare rights issues, and problems encountered by migrants, including those of Filipino migrants.

Numbering about 336 in 1998,<sup>5</sup> the migrant-concerned NGOs, according to a 2001 report, are classified into three categories: (a) labor unions, (b) church-based organizations, and (c) civic organizations (Inaba 2001). A number of these NGOs have focused mainly on the problems of Filipino migrants (as the Philippine Desk of the Solidarity Center for Migrants (SOL) in Yokohama and

Kapatiran in Tokyo). Engaged in so-called reactive activities, most of these NGOs' services respond to real problems and issues experienced by migrants.

According to Apichai Shipper, the NGOs not only "help foreign workers overcome their labor problems. They also help reconstruct social conditions for foreign workers" (Shipper n.d.). In the early stage of migration to Japan, most of the problems of Filipino migrants revolved around labor-related problems: violation of contract agreements, delay or nonpayment of salaries, abuse and discrimination at work and so on. By the mid-1990s, the migrants' problems shifted to marital and family concerns, including the problem of children.

The activities of migrant-concerned NGOs include counseling, conducting seminars, fora, and cultural activities including Japanese and mother-language teaching, providing temporary shelter, organizing self-help groups and unionizing (ibid.). According to Professor Komai (2000), "overall, the activities pursued by these groups have been helpful in mediating between the local and foreign communities."

The NGOs have also been instrumental in bringing migrant concerns (relating to labor and human rights issues) to Japanese courts. In particular, cases involving Filipinos that NGOs have brought to court and to local and international attention include "child support and children's rights, naturalization, visa status after divorce,

inheritance, and use of mother's family name (Tsuda 2002)." NGOs have also called for reforms in Japanese law regarding migrants' rights, those affecting marriage and divorce with foreign nationals that extend to child custody.

Japanese NGOs have since established transnational networks (Piper and Uhlin 1911) connecting their groups, the migrants in Japan with other NGOs in sending countries as well as other NGOs in other countries. The case of Kilusang Pangkabuhayan, introduced in 1998 at the Yamato Catholic church illustrates this. Upon the return of some of their members to the Philippines, the Japan-based group under the reintegration program of SOL linked with a migrant-support group in the Philippines (Inaba 2001, 110).<sup>6</sup> As Japan moved to relocate industries to other countries, so did Japanese NGOs expand their base of operation, from within Japan to a wider global outreach.

Aside from NGOs, several progressive local governments in Japan have been proactively providing legal protection as well as supporting the smooth integration of migrants "through establishment of foreigners' councils, supply of public information in major foreign languages, provision of various administrative services for foreign residents such as providing books for public libraries and promoting cultural exchange between immigrants and Japanese residents. Some have allowed illegal immigrants to register as aliens, which allows

them access to basic administrative services" (Komai 2000, 324). Town officials of certain Japanese northern communities acted as marriage brokers and actively launched a search in the Philippines for brides for their town's single, eligible farmers.

This "associative activism" of both Japanese NGOs and local governments, "comprise a new form of political engagement in Japan... establishing secondary associations and building a community of marginalized and socially conscious associative activists." They create an extensive network and attempt to (re)educate the Japanese public about the actual social conditions of foreign workers through their newsletters. These provide both immediate improvement of social conditions for foreign workers and a forum to bring real changes in Japan's political arena (Shipper n.d.).

*Migrant Workers' Contributions to Religious Life and Family and Social Relationships.* Migrants do not only bring their labor to any receiving country. They also bring with them their faith, their religion. Growth and movement with Japanese churches have been observed with the increase in the number of migrants, including Filipinos, who are largely Christian and predominantly Catholic.

The foreign Christian population has equaled or even outpaced the number of Japanese Catholics in many dioceses throughout Japan. Data for 1999, for instance, has shown that the foreign population constituted half

of 390,000 registered Catholics in Japan, with Filipinos representing 19 percent. Tokyo Diocese has had eighty thousand Japanese Catholics and more than a hundred foreign Catholics. Yokohama and Nagoya has reported 72 percent foreign Catholics and Chiba, 35 percent. These percentages are expected to be higher if the number of unregistered Catholics were included (Tsuda 2002, 24). For 2002, the Urawa Diocese had 19 percent Japanese Catholics, 19 percent Filipino, 42 percent Brazilian, 13 percent Peruvian, 2 percent Vietnamese, 1 percent Korean and the remaining 5 percent, from other countries (*The Urawa Diocese News*, 15 Sept. 2002, 1).

Like the rest of Japan which is affected by the aging factor, the Japanese churches also encounter a similar problem in the shortage of priests, with the number of Japanese priests below 70 years old too few to meet the increasing influx of foreign migrant believers. This situation has facilitated the entry of church-related personnel from sending countries. As of 1999, there were 12 priests from 8 religious orders and 35 religious sisters from various religious congregations from the Philippines sent to Japan.<sup>7</sup> Other sending countries have also sent more church personnel to Japan. Lay missionaries, aside from the religious have also been assigned to Japan from sending countries specifically to meet the pastoral and welfare needs of the migrants. Other large religious organizations, like the

Iglesia ni Cristo and the El Shaddai, have likewise sent their representatives to organize and care for the migrants in Japan.

Aside from their numbers, migrants, including Filipinos, have mobilized the Japanese churches to join their struggle for better labor, human and welfare rights and treatment within Japanese society. By so doing, Japanese churches are in the midst of rethinking their mission, "not only to convey the good news to the people...not merely the increase in number of the faithful but also the cooperative walk together with the poor, the suffering, those despised society, and the oppressed" (ibid., 18). As a historical parallel, the present church is referred to as the *kakikomi dera* reminiscent of a particular period in Japanese history when peasants took refuge in local temples during social and political crisis (Tsuda 2002, 24).

The influx of foreign migrants has facilitated the internationalization of the Japanese church, through the assignment of more and younger foreign personnel, availability of multi-lingual services and publications and stronger migrant-related linkages among churches, and across non-church groups, within and outside of Japan (ibid., 21).

While the process towards a genuine multicultural church, however, is slow, uncertain, and blocked by conservatism and insularity on the part of certain Japanese, the following observation by a priest is worth

noting: "In Japan migrants are persons of strong character, opening new visions of society, persons challenging the old closed society of Japan...they have not only influenced the Japanese Catholics who attend their masses, but have also changed Japanese society. They bring enthusiasm and faith, elements that are totally absent among the Japanese youth" (Fukamisu in Tsuda 2002, 21).

The same can be said of the gradual but stronger influence of migrants, including Filipinos, most especially on the family system and possibly on Japan's future demographic structure. And it is in this area where the greatest contribution of the Filipino migrants may rest: they are building homes and communities in Japan. These may be extensions or expansions of their natal homes and communities back in the Philippines. Within this domestic and personal sphere may come the tiny cracks and chips that may finally cause Japan's walls to crumble in the not so distant future.

#### FOUR FORMER ENTERTAINERS' TALES

"That's true...that's the reality," they chorused when asked if they believe the public perception that Filipino entertainers married their Japanese husbands for the money.

*We had to take care of our families back home... But, we stood up for the marriage. We have learned to love our husbands through these years."*



*Without us, Japan will be very drab. The Japanese do not know how to relax, how to unwind. We make them laugh. Masaya tayo (we are a happy people). Makatao (humane).*

*That's why the Japanese customers liked me so much...yes, that's right. Although I originally did not come here to work as an entertainer, I decided to when I noticed that the pay was good (the other three nodded in agreement, as they confirmed that they too worked as former 'justices' (read: hostesses).*

*And I enjoyed working as one...no untoward incident happened to me, even when I went out for dohan...It is not true that one has to engage in sex when one is an entertainer...One just had to be very creative and empowered so that the customers would not take advantage of you sexually...*

*For example, when a Japanese okyakusan would start to be naughty with his hands and try to touch parts of my body, I would take and look at his hands and with a serious face, start to tell him his fortune...(laughter here from all)...One had to learn how to keep the customer interested through lively, interesting talk so that the customer would learn to look at you as a person, and not look at your boobs, but you as person.*

*That's what we need to do with our present entertainers. Empower them to learn how to control the situation in the clubs to work in their favor...Not see themselves only as labor, cheap, docile, and to be played with...*

*That's what the four of us are doing now with our migrants' center...We try to show, especially our entertainers and wives (especially those physically abused by their spouses), alternatives to take control of their lives here.*

*Can you imagine that we have a recent case of a Filipino wife physically hammered by her husband? Yes, he beat her up using a real hammer! They suffer the beatings because they are not aware of the alternatives that they have for staying longer in Japan... So, we inform them about their rights so they do not have to end up in a hospital so battered like this recent case...*

*Not all Japanese husbands are abusive. Our husbands, for example, are very understanding and in fact, are very supportive of our volunteer work...(these four along with some other volunteers, Filipinos and Japanese, have put up a center in a busy red district area in Nagoya). They appreciate our work, our dedication. They also appreciate our being faithful, how we take care of them and our family.*

*They also narrated that they are not all beyond the problems of home. For example, they all burst out laughing when one of them said that her Japanese mother-in-law may have been physically bent by age but her cruel words to this Filipino wife are, in contrast, as straightforward as before. But they have learned to empower themselves and take control*

so that most of them are accepted and respected for this by their Japanese husbands, in-laws, their NGO partners, even by the members of their large Filipino community in this western area of Japan.

When told that they were different from other Filipino wives of Japanese who have either quietly settled in their domestic homes or who have organized cultural or religious groups and associations to strengthen their ethnic identity, and to serve as a cultural bridge between the Japanese and the Filipino community, they answered "*Kami rin* (we too), promote cultural activities...look at our cultural activities published in our newsletters...we sponsor concerts, bingo socials, introduce significant cultural and religious events to them like May Flower Festival, etc.

*But yes, we may be different in that we are campaigning for the empowerment of our migrants, especially our females...because we have been there where they are now.*

*We ourselves have learned to empower ourselves through the years...we try to work so that we do not have to depend financially on our husbands...(they laugh as one said she was in fact the one already supporting her husband).*

Asked what work they now do, they said they teach English, one does facial and massage services for Filipino entertainers on the side aside from heading the migrants' center, one co-owns with her Japanese husband a

door-to-door service from Japan to the Philippines, one serves as a radio announcer of news coming from the prefectural office, and so on...

## A FILIPINO HUSBAND'S TALE

He used to live a relatively well-off lifestyle in the Philippines, being the son of a lawyer, and he was holding a good job as a Customs Broker with all the perks that came with the job.<sup>8</sup> Never in his wildest dreams did he foresee that he will one day end up in Japan, get married to a fine Japanese lady of a farming family and sire bicultural Japanese-Filipino children.

They met through their religious affiliation, attending the same church. As though by Divine Providence, they met and were blessed together in marriage in 1994, in a mass wedding celebrated by their church. They have been married for five years now, with three young Filipino-Japanese children.

Asked if he is happy and contented, he will not answer directly but will tell you that he is loved by his wife and children and is very much accepted by his in-laws.

They live together in one roof. The only question asked of him by his father-in-law at the beginning of his marriage was if he could support his wife and soon-to-be family. He did not think it was a racist question because he said a typical Filipino father-in-law would have also asked the same question of him if he came to ask for a Filipino girl's hand in marriage.

Now, they do not ask him that anymore because they know. His back-braking factory work enables him to put food on the table for his extended Japanese family. Despite the sometimes ill-treatment at the place where he works, he continues to hold on to his job because he knows that he has to provide for his children and his wife and her parents.

His only complaint is that he lives in a place where there are not many Filipinos except for the entertainers. These friends he cannot share with his wife and family of course because of the stigma attached to the Filipino entertainers in Japan. And so he commutes to a neighboring city by train just to have a few hours with Filipino buddies, and to be able to talk endlessly in his native tongue of Cebuano. He talks fast and articulately in the native tongue about his experiences in Japan as if making up for all the long time he was without Filipino friends.

He and his wife also regularly practice their religious beliefs, hoping to pass it on to their children and other future generations.

#### A JAPANESE HUSBAND'S TALE

*When I saw her in a club that my friends and I visited, I fell in love with her immediately. I wooed her and finally, she agreed to be my wife.*

*Unlike some Japanese husbands who are ashamed to acknowledge in public that their wives were former Filipino entertainers, I am very proud*

*to introduce my Filipino wife because she has what is now absent among the Japanese...ningensei.*

*I was born and grew up in a rural area where I experienced what my wife and I are now trying to instill among our children: the primacy, the importance, the real worth of family over anything else in this society.*

*My wife stays at home and takes care of the children and me most times of the week. Once a week, or on busy days, she helps me with our restaurant.*

*I am very happy to have married my Filipino wife (for more than ten years).*

In the literature, the influx of migrant workers and their marriages and births in the host country have sparked some discussion on whether international migration can prevent population decline and population ageing in a country like Japan. But the United Nations Population Division 2000 report, entitled "Replacement Migration: Is It a Solution to Declining and Ageing Populations?" clearly and unequivocally concludes that "inflows of migrants will not be able to prevent population declines in the future, nor rejuvenate a national population, unless the migration streams reach comparatively high levels" (cf. Keeley 2001, 104).

Thus, although the same report notes that "in order to keep the size of working age population at the 1995 level, or 87.2 million, Japan would need 33.5 million immigrants from 1995 through 2050...an average of

609,000 immigrants needed per year during this period" (Kondo 2002, 13), Japan, most likely, will not resort to the policy of replacement migration soon or in the future given its present strict immigration policies.

The increase in intermarriages involving Filipinos and Japanese may continue but may not yet show significant impact on present national Japanese demographic situation (cf. Nita 1988; Cahil 1990; Samonte n.d.; Bauzon 1999). A longitudinal research, however, may be warranted to measure possible future results, should this trend in intermarriages continue.

The effect of replacement migration policy may be easier to trace at present within some of Japan's rural communities. Since the 1980s, the entry of so-called *noson hanayome* has been actively sought to stop depopulation in certain local communities. Local area studies should be encouraged to determine whether the entry of these foreign brides has affected the demographic profile of small communities in certain Japanese prefectures such as Yamagata and Akita. Particularly, has intermarriage resulted in higher birth rates in these former depopulated areas? Has the sex ratio in these areas also shifted upon the entry of more female foreign wives? Has the policy of recruiting brides for "the continuance of rural households and the town's preservation" been effective? (Bauzon 1999). Have the intermarriages survived? What are the longer term effects of such intermarriages on rural

family roles and structure, on rural culture and society in the future?

Conflicts within intermarriages between Filipinos and Japanese in the rural areas have been documented to include the following: the unpreparedness of the foreign wife to take on responsibility not only for her Japanese husband but for his whole family; the strong authority of the Japanese mother-in-law; the very strong and close interdependent relationship between the Japanese mother and son and unpreparedness of Japanese groom and his family for the independent spirit of the foreign wife, especially for her continuing desire to work and send money to her own family back home (ibid.). Other sources of conflict include adjustment problems related to the new environment, a totally different climate, and communication (language) barriers (ibid.). Unfortunately, given these conflicts, no study as yet has been made showing how many of previous Filipino-Japanese intermarriages have survived through the years, especially in the rural areas.

Despite findings of low marital satisfaction (Cahill 1990, 86-88) and intermarriage conflicts in rural areas and eventual separation and divorce, a number of such intermarriages have, in fact, survived up to the present. Among those who have remained married, there are those who have become permanent residents and citizens.

There is the common perception that many foreign brides, including

Filipino women, married Japanese partners for economic reasons or for money only. What is missing in this negative perception is a fuller understanding of the complete reason for doing so: It is their commitment and love for their families back home that move many to stay longer in Japan for assured financial support to their natal families. As divorce and separation will affect their stay in Japan and affect their families back home, many stay and bear the burden of difficult, problematic mixed marriages. Other possible reasons why Filipino women stay married despite abusive marriage include: (1) their religion considers marriage a lifetime commitment before God, and (2) their fear of losing custody or control of their children.

It is, however, not true that all Filipino brides of Japanese marry for money. There are those who truly love their Japanese husbands and want to remain married to them. There are many who do not depend on their Japanese partners financially. In fact, a number have become the main breadwinners, by force, in some Japanese households.

Marital union of Filipinos and Japan in the urban areas, likewise, have not been spared from problems and conflicts. These have led to separation, divorce, or continuation, and in cultural terms, separation (insistence on one's own culture of origin), marginalization, assimilation, and integration (Samonte n.d.,4).

One very important aspect of Filipino-Japanese intermarriages and partnerships is the birth and presence of children that have resulted from such mixed unions. These include children unclaimed by any parent (children without any nationality) and the so-called *haa-fu* (half) or the *daburu* (double). Haa-fu is a discriminatory term for children that are half Japanese and half foreign in descent, while daburu is a more culturally accommodating term recognizing the children as products of two cultures.

There have been reports showing how children of mixed Japanese-foreign marriages, including the so-called JFCs (the Japanese-Filipino children) or the Japinos (Japanese-Pilipino children), have been marginalized and discriminated against in homes, communities, and the whole Japanese society (Daiji n.d.).

As family is very important and a priority for Filipinos, whether these be natal families or new families involving Japanese spouses, children, in-laws, or relatives, these domestic and personal structures will yet be the most lasting contribution by the Filipino migrants within Japan's walls.

## CONCLUSION

While official Japan refuses to acknowledge the presence of, the need, for and the role of migrants within its society, a significant number

of Filipino migrants have not only settled but have also been accepted and supported by certain sectors of Japan's civil society. They have entered into marital or nonmarital unions with a number of Japanese in rural and urban areas, penetrated deeper into the intimate circle of Japanese homes and family, and produced children of mixed descent and culture, a new generation that is part of Japan's present and future history and society.

The more personal structures are expected to outshine all other contributions of Filipino migrants to Japanese society. These may yet be the very structures that will replace the present thick walls of legal and social protectionism and exclusion.

As the narratives have shown, the present crop of Filipino migrants follows different paths. There are those who expect to spend their lifetime in Japan with their expanded

transnationalized families. Among this group are permanent residents who have long divorced their Japanese spouses, and the Nikkenijin who hold long-term or permanent visas. It has been observed that these migrants have become very attractive especially to overstaying Filipinos as prospective marriage partners. Expectedly, these types of migrant couples will stay longer in Japan, together with their newly formed families.

There are also migrants, including overstayers, who expect to return to the Philippines.

Finally, there are those who consider Japan as their bridge or stepping stone to their next foreign destination, where they expect to be reunited with members of their family. There they will again start to build their new home away from home, regardless of new, formidable legal and social protectionist walls like those in Japan.

## NOTES

I would like to sincerely thank Ms. Ellen Taleon for helping us with the literature review of this paper.

1. See discussion of types of contemporary international migration system in Lee 1966.

2. The discussion regarding the statistics and data on Filipino migrants by status of residence across years is taken from Piquero-Ballescás, "Reconstructing Filipino Migration to Japan in the 1970s," *Ibid.*

3. See references for this discriminatory/disadvantageous conditions of Filipino labor in Japan.

4. Noted in internet summary of Session 149 on NGOs, Local Government, and Internationalization in Japan, <http://www.aasianst.org/absts/japan/J-149.htm>.

5. Shipper (2000) mentioned about 200 support groups while Roberts (2000) mentioned 145 NGOs,

the difference perhaps caused by variations in definitions as noted by Piper and Uhlin (2001), *Transnational Activism and Labour Issues*, p. 13.

6. Suvendrini Kakuchi, "Women: Foreign Spouses in Japan Seek Easier Child Custody Laws," [www.international-divorce.com/japanese-divorceandcustodylaw/](http://www.international-divorce.com/japanese-divorceandcustodylaw/)

7. By March 2002, however, the Catholic Diocese of Yokohama Solidarity Center for Migrants was dissolved after 10 years (Yamagishi Motoko, 6 Years Experience with the Solidarity Center for Migrants), *Migrant Network News*, Issue No. 48, May 2002, p. 2.

8. We thank Ms. Ellen Taleon for this particular narrative.

9. From the *1999 Catholic Directory of the Philippines* in Mamoru Tsuda, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

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