

FIELDWORK NOTES:
ON RECORDING AND WRITING THE HISTORY OF A
PEOPLE AT THE FRINGE OF JAPANESE SOCIETY

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I was a student at a state university in the Philippines hoping to become a medical doctor when I met and married my husband whose family is considered as the first Methodists in Japan. As I moved around the small Christian communities in Tokyo, what shocked me most was to see the low status of both the upper and middle class Japanese women and how much they had to endure the rigid ranking in society in terms of gender, age and social position. On the other hand, in my country, I grew up in a house that was full of different people discussing all kinds of serious matters. Politicians. Farmers. Workers. Academicians. Scientists. There was no rigid ranking. It was expected of both men and women to give service to society, have careers, be vocal and engaging, be learned, and raise a huge family as well. Women were active economically, politically and socially—and in high heels.

My husband's family members were exposed to Western culture by education, work or their sheer Christian legacy. I therefore had no problems talking to them in English, but they had problems in dealing with me for the simple reason that I am from a Third World Asian country. Back then, a *gaikokujin* was, for all intents and purposes, white, blue-eyed and blonde. I am Asian. Therefore, how should they relate to me? My mother-in-law decided that the best way to deal with the situation was to hasten the process of my

Japanization. She refused to talk to me any further in English but only in her upper-class, high-pitched Nihongo which I absorbed and mimicked so easily. My own mother cried when she first heard me speaking that way because she raised me as a hard-hitting but soft-hearted, educated human being out to solve the problems of the oppressed. Thus, every time I went back and forth Japan and the Philippines, I underwent a process of tangling and untangling my entire being.

Being visually Southeast Asian, I was an easy target for sexual propositions, (“How much do you cost per night?”), groped from the front and back in trains, looked at leerily and talked to in very hurtful ways. When I think of my over-all experience in Japan, two words come out: fear and the shame. I fear the Japanese men, and I fear the Japanese women who fear me for their men. I was ashamed of my skin color, my face and my body and the action and reactions it aroused from the Japanese people around me. I feared discrimination for myself, my children and my husband. We have been refused restaurant seats, right to buy a house, shouted at by unknown people. The reason for this discrimination is that my presence is threatening, coinciding with the expansion of the presence of the “newcomer” foreigners: Filipinos like me, Brazilians, Peruvians and Thais. Our presence exacerbates the earlier unresolved problem of the having the *zainichi* Koreans and Chinese—外国人問題—as the Japanese like to refer to us; 問題—“problem”—being the keyword to remember us by.

To protect myself, I learned to discriminate against other newcomers by hiding in my upper-classness, my good family, my good education, my good English. My mantra was, “I am not like them.” “I am not like them.” I lived a life of virtual recluse from “the others” until one day, a yakuza who heard about me, came to my house, dropped to his knees, then bowed deeply on the floor,

asking for help for his beloved wife who lay dying in a hospital, unable to be understood by everyone around her, including himself.

This was the auspicious start of a lifetime project of writing the history of women at the fringe of Japanese society that includes me. In this project, I have interviewed more than 100 women, men and children in the Kansai area at the same time, photographing them. My project focuses on Filipinos especially the women because their presence has had a great impact on Japanese society. While this statement might cause a lot of eyebrows to go up as stereotypes of Filipinos abound, it is my belief that their presence hastened the process of Japan's internationalization during the past two decades, and at the same time caused a transformation of Japan's civil society. Let me review some facts that are already well-known.

Japan's experience with immigration and permanent settlement is relatively short compared to other industrialized countries such as the United States, Germany, France and Italy. In Japan, the permanent settlement of foreigners has never been a part of its immigration laws and policies: in fact there is no clear-cut process for naturalization and the provisions for eligibility are very ambiguous. Immigration and permanent settlement of ethnic minorities were merely an appendix to Japan's colonial and imperialist history, vis-à-vis Korea and China. Thus, resident Koreans and Chinese formed the first and only layer of immigrants until a series of events that occurred in the 1970s, commencing with the entry of Filipino women.

After World War II, Filipinos in Japan could only be found in small numbers and were scattered for example, in Okinawa, where they were workers and professionals in US military installations. In large cities, they were professional entertainers and domestic workers working at diplomatic missions and for expatriate families. Actually as early as 1946, some Filipino women

were “repatriated” together with their Japanese husbands who had been incarcerated after the end of the war. Of these, only a bit over twenty stayed due to the harsh realities of postwar reconstruction in Japan. All of them were given automatic Japanese citizenship and tended to shy away from the each other because of their traumatic experiences. Thus, no Filipino community was formed and no chain of migration occurred.

In 1972, martial law was declared in the Philippines. I was a high school student then. For me, that year was the watershed in postwar Japan-Philippine relations because it was under martial law that the RP-Japan Treaty of Amity, Commerce and Navigation was ratified, revised and re-ratified. The treaty abolished earlier restrictions on travel, trade and investment so that within a year after its ratification, Japan’s investments to the Philippines expanded by 400% in 1974–75, and resulted in an influx of Japanese managers, technicians, and tourists.

This consequently led to the development of a service industry catering exclusively to the Japanese males and the term “sex tour” was born. In Manila, these tours became a rallying point for NGOs. In 1981, when Prime Minister Suzuki Zenko paid state visits to Southeast Asian countries, including to the Philippines, feminists, religious workers, and activists joined hands with other international NGOs in protests and mass actions. They successfully drew worldwide attention to Japanese sex tours in Asia, mainly to the Philippines, Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand. Ironically, these groups’ success at the public humiliation of the Japanese male “consumers” had a far-reaching consequence: instead of men going on tours, the women were “invited” to come to Japan. From the traditional “supply and demand” point of view, I conclude that the situation that created a male Japanese “market” for Asian women was part of a process. On the side of Japan, there is a cultural and historical acceptance of

women sold for sexual slavery (for example, the geisha is not the romanticized floating world that we perceive it to be—rather, it is an early example of trafficking of women and children) and that there has always been a high “demand,” and the profit of margin was huge in businesses that use women as commodities.

On the Philippine side, there was an abundant supply of cheap labor, and political repression gave way to economic despondence and poverty, thus widely pushing the migratory door. And out of this unequal and oppressive situation, we saw the birth of the Filipino entertainers bound for Japan, initiating then creating an unprecedented and permanent Philippine migration to Japan.

This massive migration of Filipinos and their permanent settlement here was initially invisible and unplanned. However by 1998, there were 165,000 Filipinos, and by 2005 over 200,000 were in the country, figures that do not include undocumented workers or the so-called Japanese-Filipino/Filipino-Japanese children. The Filipinos are the fourth largest ethnic minority group in the country and the earliest of all foreign newcomers and have occupied the top marriage partners for Japanese men for the past decade.

The Filipino community is unique as an ethnic group. First, it is gender specific, with women forming the bulk of the community. Second, its entry is also work and industry specific, i.e., in the entertainment and/or service sector. Third, temporary settlement has become increasingly permanent by virtue of marriage and family. Fourth, Filipino migration to Japan enabled the u-turn migration of Peruvian and Brazilians of Japanese ancestry. Fifth, it was the plight of Filipino women and, later, of the men who came to Japan as undocumented workers in the 3-D (dirty, difficult, dangerous) industries that became a rallying point for many of Japan’s NGOs and resulted in the revision

of labor laws to also protect non-Japanese workers. Sixth, it was the plight of Filipino women, both as workers and as settlers after marriage to Japanese men that became the rallying point for the establishment of numerous NGOs in local communities. Many local government offices were forced to introduce services to foreigners at a faster pace, making them more aware that human rights issues should also extend to non-Japanese. This was almost unheard of with regards to the first layer Korean and Chinese migrants.

It is because of the oppression of Filipino women in the workplace and the discrimination that they and their children face in Japanese society that “human rights” has become a much-recognized term in the country. While it is true, of course, that resident Koreans and Chinese have been combating decades of discrimination, the presence of Filipino women contributed vastly for the common recognition of the issue. While they are part of a fledgling community beset with problems—such as a high divorce rate and lack of social and economic mobility—it is the Filipino women in Japan who helped initiate networking that later sparked grassroots groups’ interest in other Asian countries and peoples.

When Japanese NGO members started visiting the Philippines, they came back to Japan refreshed, with a new sense of direction, optimism, and organizational skills. If one looks at the list for example, of Japanese feminist leaders like Matsui Yayori, many of them would point out to their experience or education in the Philippines as their turning point. It is not surprising to note that some of the more established Japanese NGOs actually have a Filipino name. Thus, another type of not-yet-recognized migrant from the Philippines is the highly skilled NGO organizer. Even those in the academic field who are experts on, for example, Asia, learn a great deal more from their Filipino counterparts than vice-versa.

It was the plight of Filipino women that paved the way for mainstream groups such as the Japan Federation of Bar Associations and Japan's Civil Liberties Union to take up the issue of foreigners in this country and put up services for non-Japanese speaking people in need of legal assistance. It is also because of the presence of women from the Philippines and other countries that Japan's legal system—in particular, family, immigration, and nationality laws—has been revised and is undergoing further revision more quickly than before. The revisions of course are also favorable to Japanese women and children, but this was just the footnote.

The Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Law which is the embodiment of Japan's migration policies was amended in 1989, a decade after Filipino women started to enter Japan in huge numbers. New and more specific categories were introduced to control the entry and settlement of foreign newcomers. It was a move that was too late, and ineffective, if meant to control Japan's borders since the Filipinos already had one foot in the door, that no matter how hard one slammed it, it could not be closed anymore.

On a spiritual level, it is the Filipinos—not St. Francis Xavier or the early Christians—together with Latinos mainly of Japanese descent, who are reviving Christianity in Japan, particularly the Catholic Church. From Hokkaido to Kyushu, the hymns being sang are now to the beat of guitars and drums and handclaps.

The massive translation of government materials into different languages were started at the local level to fit to the pressing needs of the Filipino women residents. It is also because of the Filipino women, that many Japanese have been prompted to learn English. The process of internationalization became faster and brought about not by the presence of Westerners, but by the newcomers, particularly the Filipino women.

My interviews have opened my eyes to the reality of a changing Japanese society. And in the process, I too have changed. For now, I do not cringe at my own identity or fear or have shame of who I am. I now have a much more important mission that is to write the history of people who have greatly impacted this country yet delegated to the fringe of the Japanese society.

フィールドワーク・ノート： 日本に移住したフィリピン人のオーラル・ヒストリー

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日本の出入国や定住についての歴史的経験は、米国、ドイツ、フランス、イタリアなどの他の先進工業諸国と比べて比較的浅い。しかし、この数10年間の日本は、多くのニューカマーとして韓国人、中国人、ブラジル人、フィリピン人、その他を受け入れることとなった。にもかかわらず、かれらに関する法制度や政策には整合性がない。サポートシステムも弱く、日本人の間でかれらの存在について愛憎こもごもの態度が根強く残っている。ニューカマーの中では、おそらく最も早い時期に日本のイミグレーションという扉を開けたのがフィリピン人である。現在、日本には20万人ほどのフィリピン人がおり、その内の9割は女性である。本研究は日本の「国際化」およびその市民社会の変革に寄与したフィリピン人に焦点をあてる。フィールドワーク（インタビューと写真撮影を含む）を通して、かれらの、「1世」としての日本での生活、家族そしてコミュニティーを記録し考察していく。