

# Remembering the Great Ancestors: Images of Japanese Emigrants from the Perspective of Third- and Fourth-Generation Philippine *Nikkeijin* in Japan

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## Abstract

The term *nikkeijin* refers to the descendants of Japanese emigrants who arrived in the Philippines before 1945 or in the aftermath of the Second World War. After the war, anti-Japanese sentiment within and outside the Philippines heightened. As a result, first- and second-generation *nikkeijin* sought to conceal their identities and destroy all documents revealing their Japanese blood. The third- and fourth-generation (*sansei* and *yonsei*) *nikkeijin*, in contrast, lived in the decades of Japan's rise as an economic giant. This was an epoch of technological and cultural fame as younger generations of Filipinos excitedly consumed popular culture produced by, and in the homeland of, their former invader. In spite of the country's current stature, however, the *nikkeijin* live in a society in which Japan's wartime role highlights the antagonistic images of the Japanese soldiers.

Utilizing the narratives of the *sansei* and *yonsei*, this paper reveals how these third- and fourth-generation *nikkeijin* portray their Japanese ancestors who lived in the Philippines before, during, or after the Second World War. Amidst the discourses of Japan's aggressiveness, *nikkeijin* provide an alternative view, emphasizing the heroic,

benevolent, and even victimized images of their forefathers. This positive view of their ancestors, I argue, is neither a manifestation of Japanese identity nor of nationalist predispositions. Instead, *nikkeijin* find an opportunity to expose a counternarrative that has been kept from earlier generations, with hopes that these alternative discourses may promote further social acceptance of their histories and ancestral legacies, thereby enhancing their integration to the Philippine society.

Keywords: Filipino *nikkeijin*, *sansei*, *yonseï*, Japanese ancestors

### Introduction

WHILE THEY ARE KNOWN as *Hapon* (Japanese) in their respective communities, third-generation (*sanseï*) and fourth-generation (*yonseï*) *nikkeijin* see themselves as genuine Filipinos. Indeed, they embrace deeply ingrained Filipino values, traditions and beliefs, a mark of successful cultural socialization and integration in their homeland. Nevertheless, they also reveal their connections to Japan through their narratives about their ancestors—candid accounts of the legacies and valor of wartime Japanese. These narratives, which encompass stories passed from their forefathers, are entwined with the cultural perception and identities of the *nikkeijin* narrators.

How do Philippine *nikkeijin* present their ancestral narratives to a Filipino audience exposed to the historical issues of widespread wartime iniquities of the Japanese occupation? With this question, I examined the accounts of the third- and fourth-generation *nikkeijin* that dealt with the lives and legacies of their ancestors, the so-called “*dekasegi*” emigrants who left their impoverished communities in Japan, worked and settled in the Philippines, and eventually became victims of the anti-Japanese sentiment during and after the war. Examined through thematic and content analysis, this paper argues that the narratives of the *sanseï* and *yonseï* *nikkeijin* deliberately attempt to emphasize in wartime memoirs the marginalization of unpopular and untold accounts of early Japanese emigrants. Determined to voice out their “unspoken truths,” *nikkeijin* offer alternatives to the popular narratives in order to promote further social

acceptance of their ethnic identities and legacies. Inspired by Kinoshita's (2003) dissertation about "Storied Identities," this article applies the concept formulated by Cindy Kobayashi Mackey in understanding the narratives of the Japanese in Hawaii. These narratives are "an outcome of a constructive process in which Japanese Americans fictionalize stories but justify them as real by emphasizing the role of human agency in making the stories" (Mackey, quoted by Kinoshita 2003, 5). The stories were seemingly manipulated, but the storytellers entirely believed that they are speaking of reality. Similarly, the author treats the narratives in this present study as 'reconstructed' realities, which have been subjected to contextualized modifications after passing through generations of Philippine *nikkeijin*. The stories told by the *sansei* and *yonsei nikkeijin* are artifacts shaped by their interactions with the Filipino and Japanese audience, responses to what they think are their audience's thoughts, and meanings incurred during socialization and cultural contact.

Kinoshita's framework is relevant to my study because of the contextual similarities of our research subjects. In Kinoshita's work, the sources of the narratives are the Japanese American elderly in Puna who expressed their thoughts and memories for a meaningful purpose.

The remaining Japanese American elderly, knowing that their memories of the plantation may be headed to oblivion, remember and talk about the plantation experience whenever they find an opportunity at church activities, senior citizens clubs, funerals, community festivals, family reunions, school reunions, or plantation camp reunions. They also consent to interviews conducted by researchers from high schools and universities. Their incentives for telling about their plantation experience vary one to another. Some just wish to feel nostalgic, while others seriously seek to leave a history to their offspring as proof of their existence, and still others tell their stories as part of socializing with friends and acquaintances who share similar experiences. (Kinoshita 2003, 17)

Likewise, my interviewees spoke about historical matters that seem to be reconstructions, as these are passed from generation to generation. They wanted to narrate the lives of their ancestors because they also fear that such accounts risk being forgotten. My objective is thus to relay how the sansei and yonsei remember their ancestors and how such memories are told and retold in a manner that goes against the popular opinion of their society, causing a reinterpretation of their experiences, and defining their collective identity as *nikkeijin* from the Philippines.

Exploring the “identity” of *nikkeijin* warrants conceptual understanding of being Japanese. Discussing the essence of Japaneseness, Takenaka (2003) emphasized the concept of blood as “a symbol of familial ties... the conflated notion of Japanese race and culture... (which) served well to justify the right of *nikkeijin* to enter, reside, and work in Japan”(225). Using this logic, Japan has utilized the skills and labor of foreigners of Japanese descent. However, the term “*nikkeijin*” reflects “how Japanese conceive of their relationship to those who have migrated overseas and their descendants” (Roth 2002, 23). Since the term does not refer to the ethnically Japanese people residing in Japan, it connotes exclusion from the inner socioethnic loop of Japanese society. *Nikkeijin* may share a part of the lineage, yet they are still *gaikokujin* (foreigner or outsider) from the perspective of the natives. This was further expounded by Yamashiro (2008) who claimed that the notion of *nikkeijin* “may or may not include the original migrants themselves” (983). In a Japanese context, a *nikkeijin* is different from a “Japanese” in terms of two components.

From a Japanese perspective, those who were born and socialized primarily in Japan, especially if they still have Japanese citizenship, will in most cases be considered as Japanese. At the same time, however, if these Japanese adapted to a different society and developed new communities and worldviews, and if they gave up their Japanese citizenship, they could be seen as having become a *nikkeijin*. (Ibid.)

Away from their home society (Japan), the Japanese diaspora and the *nikkeijin* and their identities are shaped by “complex historical, social

and cultural dynamics within the group and in its relationship with other groups” (Alegado 2003, 14). Thus, the retention of “ancestral customs, language, and religion, the marriage pattern of its members, and particularly the case of communication between various parts of the transnational group” (ibid.) highly influences the features and characteristics of their fluid identities. Such elements also shape the *nikkeijin*’s images of their grandparents and great grandparents. Through these conceptual musings, I argue that the narratives of the *sansei* and *yonsei* reflect their identities as Filipino *nikkeijin*. In the absence of rich symbolic practices and traditions, younger generations of *nikkeijin* engage in a politics of remembering as they embrace their own storied identities during their temporary sojourn in their ancestral homeland.

### Methodology

This study utilizes in-depth interviews of Philippine *nikkeijin* residing and working in Japan. The fieldwork was carried out in Aichi Prefecture, one of the areas with significant concentration of *nikkeijin* engaging in factory labor. To recruit research participants, I visited three religious institutions where Philippine *nikkeijin* attend worship services: *Mikokoro* Catholic Center, *Iglesia Ni Cristo* (INC), and Immanuel Christian Fellowship in Nagoya City. Through the assistance of the leaders of these religious institutions and their affiliate Filipino migrant organizations, I was able to collect the contact details of Philippine *nikkeijin*. In total, I interviewed 50 of them: 4 *nisei* (second-generation), 29 *sansei* (third-generation), and 17 *yonsei* (fourth-generation) *nikkeijin*.

Most of the interviewees (20 *sansei* and 10 *yonsei*) come from Davao, one of the areas with the highest population of Philippine *nikkeijin*. Twelve interviewees (3 *sansei* and 9 *yonsei*) came from Metro Manila, although some of them have close relatives in Davao or other provinces. The rest of the interviewees resided in Surigao, General Santos City, Baguio, Ilocos, and Isabela. Twenty-eight interviewees are female and 22 are male. Almost all respondents attained higher education: 34 *nikkeijin* graduated

from college, 4 underwent post-high school vocational training, 5 graduated from high school, and only 7 did not reach secondary education.

It is important to specifically choose a generational group because of the differences of cultural behavior and perception of each generation. Takahashi (1997), for instance, noted that the *issei*, *nisei*, and *sansei* in a Japanese American community are depicted as “having their own characterological traits, as well as being relatively uniform in their beliefs and behavior” (7). In this paper, I focused on the narratives of the third- and fourth- generation because of the following reasons: First, they have no direct encounter with their Japanese ancestors; their knowledge of the *issei* (first-generation) were based on anecdotes of their parents and grandparents, as well as accumulated information gathered from social institutions like the school, NGOs, workplaces, and mass media. Second, the *sansei* and *yonsei* currently dominate Philippine *nikkeijin* communities in various factories and manufacturing centers in Aichi prefecture. Because of their increasing population, they are the easiest to find in Japanese factories and churches. Their presence in Filipino parties and social gatherings signifies generational proximity and closeness to non-*nikkeijin* Filipinos, a feature that clearly distinguishes them from the *nisei* migrants. Third, having little Japanese blood, *sansei* and *yonsei* are more integrated in Philippine society. It is interesting, then, to elicit their views on their Japanese lineage, since perceptions are deemed products of their personal reflections and social interactions with the dominant ethnic majority in the Philippines.

Each interview session was divided into two parts—a session on *nikkeijin* consciousness and another on their current labor status in Japan. This paper utilized the narratives on the first part, which describe their perception on being a *nikkei*, the processes that led to their discovery of being a *nikkeijin*, their knowledge and images of their Japanese ancestors, and the effects of those images on their family culture and traditions. The first part of the interviews lasted, on average, for one hour.

The common themes of the narratives are presented in this paper. Because of the volume of stories, comments, perceptions, and worldviews

culled from the interviews, I selected few narratives that clearly represent the collective stories of the group. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of the interviewees, although most of them allowed me to write the real name/s of their ancestors.

### **From Emigrants to Nikkeijin**

The International Nikkei Research Project defines “nikkei” as “persons of Japanese descent or descendants, who emigrated from Japan and who created unique communities and lifestyles within the societies in which they now live” (Ohno 2007, 243). In a legal context, the Embassy of Japan in Manila, through its official webpage, declares that a nikkeijin visa can be granted to the “children of Japanese Nationals born on or before the end of World War II (referred to as the second-generation or nisei), the second-generation’s descendants, and their spouses” (Visa Section of the Embassy of Japan in the Philippines 2012).

The nikkeijin owe their roots to Japanese migration that started in the 1880s when the Meiji government sent laborers to Australia, Hawaii, the United States of America, and Canada because of rising population and failing agricultural policies in rural Japan (Sasaki 2008, 54). In 1908, Japanese farmers began to join the emigration wave as they found jobs in Brazilian coffee plantations (Knight 2002, 16). Some of these Japanese peasants were also contracted to work in cotton and silk farms, while others managed to establish their own businesses in Sao Paolo. Through emigration organization and companies (*imindantai* and *imingaisha*), emigration to Brazil, which was sustained by a massive outflow of laborers together with their families and relatives, peaked at 188,209 (MOFA 1971, as cited in Sasaki 2008).

In contrast to the enormous family migration of Japanese to Latin America, migration to the Philippines in the early 1900s was initially composed of farmers and construction workers. As early as 1888, the Japanese Emperor Mutsuhito promulgated an imperial decree creating

a first-class consulate in Manila in order to maintain trading ties and intensify the migration of businessmen and workers (Saniel 1962, 271). Between 1903 and 1904, thousands of Japanese male workers arrived in the Philippines to work on the Benguet Road and other infrastructure projects of the American colonial government (Yu-Jose 1994, 11). While most male emigrants came to work on roads, railroads, bridges, coal mine sites, and military barracks, there were also around 300 Japanese female emigrants known as *karayukisan* who worked as prostitutes for the American soldiers in the Philippines. However, with the rising number of soldiers contracting venereal diseases, the colonial government closed the brothel businesses and deported 122 Japanese women (Terami-Wada 2010, 65). As anti-prostitution policy drastically decreased the number of *karayukisan* in the Philippines, the Japanese government in the 1920s still encouraged emigration of Japanese women who would become wives of Japanese laborers. Watanabe Kaoru, correspondent of the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce, insisted that Japanese women should go to the Philippines to serve as wives and “give comfort to the lonely Japanese men” (Yu-Jose 1994, 17).

It seemed that a significant number of Japanese women responded to the government’s call for marriage migration. However, most of them stayed in Metro Manila; six hundred and eighty-four Japanese wives were registered under the 1939 Philippine census survey (Ohno 2007, 35). Outside the country’s capital, many Japanese migrants married or lived with Filipino women. In fact, the aforementioned survey indicated that the number of Filipinas married to Japanese male citizens was 874 for the whole country, and that 269 of those marriages took place in Davao. It is important to note that the said figure possibly excluded unregistered marriages, specifically those who had partners from non-Christian indigenous ethnic groups. Nevertheless, such intermarriages resulted in the proliferation of Japanese communities in Manila, Davao, Baguio, Mountain Province, and other areas before the outbreak of the Second World War. Their children, known as the *nisei* (second-generation) or “Japanese mestizo children” were mostly unregistered at the local civil registry.



Although the *nisei* in the Philippines had mixed parentage, they were exposed to Japanese tradition and culture, as were their counterparts in Brazil and other Latin American territories. Most of these children were enrolled in Japanese elementary schools where teachers taught *shushin* (morals) and *Kyoiku Chokugo* (the Imperial rescript on education)[Ohno 2007, 37]. The “Japanization” program of second-generation *nikkeijin* in the Philippines taught them that they were real Japanese, and thus were subjects of the Emperor. This system of Japanese education, along with the imperial government’s Japanization campaign and propaganda, ended when America defeated Japan in the Second World War and transformed Philippine society thereafter.

About five decades after the war, the *nisei* and their descendants were offered a chance to return to their ancestral land. Concerned about a labor shortage, the Japanese government welcomed their return from Brazil and Latin American countries, declaring to the wary public that these *nikkeijin* deserve to experience the rich culture of Japan because they are distinctly coethnics. Policies on immigration were framed and justified by emphasizing the shared culture between Japanese nationals and foreign-born descendants. In 1990, the government promulgated a revised immigration law that “sanctioned the *teijusha* visa which allows *nikkeijin* to legally emigrate, live, and work in Japan on the basis of their Japanese blood descent” (Sharpe 2010, 359).

Today, the Philippine *nikkeijin* in Japan are mostly factory workers. *Sansei* and *yonsei* dominate Japanese manufacturing centers, while their *nisei* parents or grandparents repatriated to the Philippines because of their age and health. Most of my interviewees earn JPY151,000–200,000 per month, inclusive of overtime. They described their salary “unsatisfactory,” which is significantly lower than the wages in the 1990s. Most of these factory workers were placed under “unstable employment situation” for being either temporary or contract workers (Ohno & Iijima 2010, 86). In terms of their visa status, majority are long-term and permanent residents, while some opted to become Japanese citizens.

Compared with other migrants from the Philippines, *nikkeijin* are entitled to better opportunities and compensation packages. As documented workers, they are “in limited supply and great demand” (Rebick 2005, 163). In contrast, the entertainers who comprised the majority of Filipino migrants in the 1980s and 1990s were allowed to stay for only a maximum of six months. A number of them did not complete their contracts, and instead ran away to join their Filipino friends or transfer to better-paying jobs, notwithstanding their illegal status in Japan (Balleascas 2003, 555). Other Filipinos in construction, manufacturing, or agricultural labor have longer contracts, but employment schemes limit their mobility and length of stay in Japan. In short, the *nikkeijin*, considered as “co-ethnics” of the Japanese nationals, have better prospects in the labor market, thereby obtaining the best employment packages for foreigners. Although they have limited political and civic rights, the *nikkeijin* have full access to medical care and public health services (Shipper 2008, 30). On the one hand, this is advantageous for sojourners who simply want to improve their economic status before returning home. On the other hand, this emphasized the fact that *nikkeijin* are still considered foreigners, despite their ethnic status. *Nikkeijin* groups, including those from the Philippines, experience the politics of acceptance and rejection in Japan, which affects their perception of the country, people, and even their ancestral images.

Several scholars have explored the identities and ethnic consciousness of various *nikkeijin* groups from North and Latin America. Lamentably, there is a dearth of literature dealing with the identity dynamics and negotiations of *nikkeijin* from the Philippines save for ethnographic research, combined with documentary analysis that had been conducted to explore the historical and social development of *nikkeijin* communities, particularly in Davao (Fresnoza-Flot 2008) and Baguio (Afaible 2008). Focusing on identity development, a relevant study on the Filipino *shin-nikkeijin* revealed three interlocking patterns of ethnic identification among Filipino-Japanese children: ethnic preference, the colonizing lens of the majority, and the interiorized ethnic clash/struggle (Almonte-Acosta 2008). Filipino-Japanese children wrestle with their

feelings and reactions towards members of a majority group who emphasized their difference or inferiority. The findings from these foregoing studies are valuable in advancing more research on *nikkeijin* children, but differ from the present study, which focuses on the “new” *nikkeijin*.

Shun Ohno thoroughly explored the Philippine *nikkeijin* ethnic consciousness through historical analysis, documentary research, and surveys. Describing Philippine *nikkeijin* identity as “diasporic” and/or “deterritorialized,” Ohno (2008, 2) noted that the transnational citizenship of the *nikkeijin* is merely for instrumental purposes and “does not mean the loss of Filipino identity”(16). Also, his findings suggest a manifestation of having “multiethnic dual identity” (ibid).

Similarly, the *nikkeijin* from Okinawa seemed to retain their Filipino-ness during migratory processes. Zulueta (2011) argues that the return of “Philippine *uchinanchu*” (Filipino migrants of Okinawan descent) to their ethnic homeland is transitory and their perception of home is tied to “how they construct their identity in relation to current global conditions” (12). Okinawa, for Zulueta, is a place of intersecting movements, a homeland for some who want to connect to their Okinawan roots, or a transitory place for those who have a stronger Filipino identity.

The aforementioned studies explore the dynamics of ethnic identities from the viewpoint of those who were exposed to the culture and practices of the Japanese in diaspora. The third- and fourth- generations, however, remain unnoticed and voiceless in the academic literature. Their narratives and perceptions are highly important to document their stories and uncover the linkages of images and perceptions and the formation of transnational identity.

### **The Discovery of Being a *Nikkeijin* in the Philippines**

Understandably, the *nisei* (second-generation) descendants encountered first-generation (*issei*) Japanese emigrants at some point. The *nisei* had full knowledge of their Japanese background from their childhood to the Second World War, when they had to conceal their ethnic identity. However, for the third-and fourth-generation *nikkeijin*, ethnic awareness

depends on several factors. In terms of physical features, the traces of Japanese ancestry are rather difficult to identify. Also, they have Filipino or Spanish-sounding surnames and Christian names. They only speak the languages spoken by other Filipinos—Tagalog and/or their regional/ethnic languages. In some localities, nikkeijin organizations exist to promote cultural awareness and employment (Fresnoza-Flot 2008), although not all are vibrant and well-organized.

Most of the sansei have been aware of their ethnic composition since childhood, when they were informed about their Japanese lineage by their parents or grandparents. These sansei heard wartime stories that highlight the tragic events experienced by their ancestors. Other interviewees claimed that they saw photos of their Japanese relatives, as well as some articles—Japanese money, newspaper, and family documents—that were left behind. Mel, a nikkeijin from Cavite, learned about her ethnic roots because of the physical appearance of her father. She also saw the photos of her grandfather in Japanese attire. Moreover, Mel grew curious about her Japanese background through her father's social circle, and because her father constantly wrote letters to relatives in Japan. She used to wonder why her father spoke 'Hapon' (*Nihongo*) to several friends who resided there. She later understood that these friends were actually relatives.

Education was another point of ethnic discovery for nikkei children. Eight interviewees attended a nikkeijin school in the Philippines. Chesca from Davao recalled her experience at the Philippine Nikkeijin Kai in Davao City.

My brother and I had attended school at the Philippine Nikkeijin-Kai. That's where I learned the Japanese counting system, simple greetings, and expressions like *suwatttekudasai*... Every afternoon we practice writing a,i,u,e,o...hiragana, katakata, kanji. But that time, I didn't understand why I was there. I was wondering what's with that school, and why we needed to learn Japanese. Eventually, I've learned that we are descendants. I still didn't understand what they meant by that,

but I remember my dad showing us a picture of our great grandfather who looked like Emperor Hirohito (laugh). Then, I understood what being *nikkeijin* means.

This school was established by the Philippine *Nikkeijin Kai Incorporated*, an organization of *nikkeijin* whose Japanese ancestors migrated to Davao between 1903 and 1941. The organization established numerous learning institutions, including the *Mindanao Kokusai Daigaku*, which offers regular college courses that integrate Japanese language and cultural training in their curricula. Noel also remembers that his awareness of being *nikkeijin* was first raised by his elementary teacher.

My teacher spoke to me when I was still in elementary school: “study harder...so that after you graduate high school, you can go to Japan because you’re a descendant.” I was surprised and amazed. I was very excited. So when I graduated high school, I was already determined to go to Japan. I still entered college, but when my visa came out during my second year in the university, I just decided to stop. I knew there’s much to earn here.

Some of the *sansei* interviewees discovered their ethnic roots in adulthood. They said they were unaware of their *nikkeijin* status until “a group of Japanese” visited their home sometime in the 1990s to talk to their parents. Purportedly, these Japanese groups, either to reconnect with relations or recruit for Japanese companies, were seeking descendants in the Philippines. Some of the interviewees believe that these Japanese were members of NGOs (nongovernmental organizations) that supported the plight and conditions of the *nikkeijin*.

This coincided with the peak of Brazilian *nikkeijin*’s return migration to Japan. Adrian recalled that

It was in 1992 when my dad learned that we are Japanese descendants. Before that, we knew nothing about being *nikkeijin*. That year, my grandfather’s brother who lived here in Japan, in Fukuoka, visited the

Philippines to look for us. The Japanese man told my dad that he was aware that he has relatives in the Philippines, and he also confessed that he left a family in the Philippines. He said he was an intelligence personnel during the war. The brother of my grandfather told us that our grandfather registered my dad's name in Fukuoka, so he came to the Philippines to bring the kosekitohon. We're very lucky for that, and we're thankful. Without the koseki, it would be really difficult to come to Japan.

Adrian's father, who was making a living as a small-scale farmer, was surprised about the document delivered by his grandfather's brother. Eventually, their relatives in Japan supported and facilitated their deployment to the country.

In sum, a large number of descendants knew of and emphasized their lineage even during childhood. And regardless of the timing of their discovery, their stories present interesting themes that highlight their symbolic and actual connections to Japan. First are narratives about "symbolic" linkages, represented by their grandparents' photos, books, letters, and other emblems of Japanese identity. Second are stories about "human" connections. Some nikkeijin emphasized people-to-people relationships as they talked about their relatives or even friends who invited them to work in Japan. For others, Japan-sponsored organizations found and helped them, despite the absence of cultural markers that identify them as nikkeijin. These personal anecdotes and self-characterizations differentiate them from other Japan-bound workers. Referring to Kinoshita's storied identities, I argue that these narratives of connections are the "powerful collective voice" that "assert the meaningfulness of their lives to others as well as to themselves" (Ibid. 2003, 5).

### **Recollection of Ancestral Legacies**

The powerful wave of anti-Japanese sentiment following the Pacific War forced the first- and second- generation nikkeijin to conceal their

ethnic identity and destroy all the tangible proofs that link them to Japanese nationals. The once vibrant Japanese communities in the country vanished, leaving the descendants no communal enclave for ethnic and cultural bonding and socialization. Nikkeijin children were even prevented by their parents from disclosing their Japanese lineage to evade discrimination in schools and home communities.

This paper does not present the accounts of the interviewees as historical realities. Rather, these are the idiosyncratic truths viewed by the nikkejin as they make sense of their nikkeijin-ness in a society that has regarded Japan as an enemy in the past, and as an inspiration in the present. While historical and popular discourses highlight the cruelties of the Japanese military during the war, the nikkeijin have interesting narratives stressing heroism and benevolence.

All the interviewees were aware of the general occupational status of their Japanese ancestors. Most of them lack details of their ancestral histories, yet know why and how they came to the Philippines. During the interview session, I asked them to tell the stories about their Japanese ancestors: when, why, and how they migrated to the Philippines. I categorized their responses according to the themes of their narratives. Most of them claimed that their ancestors were Japanese soldiers (25 interviewees); paramilitary, intelligence, staff, spy, or translator for Japanese military (8 interviewees), businessman (7 interviewees), farmer (4 interviewees), construction worker (1 interviewee), “laborer” (unaware of the specific type of labor) (1 interviewee), and Japanese housewife (4 interviewees).

### My Great Grandfather was a Soldier

The soldiers of the Japanese Imperial Army entered the Philippine islands on 8 December 1941. The Philippines severely suffered because of the occupants’ inhumane treatment and policies, killing thousands of Filipinos who resisted or refused to cooperate with the regime (Agoncillo 1980). Understandably, post-war Philippine society developed a negative perception of Japanese soldiers and paramilitary members. Throughout the decade

following Japan's defeat, Japan was considered the "enemy" of the Filipino people. The improvement of relations between Japan and the Philippines were only realized after going through the diplomacy of apologies and the "politics of mourning" (Satoshi 2008, 337). The memory of war gradually faded in the 1980s as Japan reemerged as an economic inspiration, a "model," and a "place of greener pasture" (Yu-Jose 2000, 9).

Majority of the interviewees claimed that their great grandfathers were members or accessories of the Japanese Imperial Army. Japanese spies reportedly came even before the occupation of the Philippines. Historical accounts of the suffering and traumatic experiences of Filipinos were documented and taught to Filipino students from primary school to college. Apparently, some *nikkeijin*, especially those educated in the Philippine academic system, had painstakingly accepted such historical details with repugnance and discomfort. Ms. Osawa, one of the *nisei* from Naga City, joined us while I was interviewing her *sansei* daughter. She tearfully recalled the story of her father.

What I know is that he came to the Philippines during the war. He was with Commandant Matsubara. He served as an interpreter under Matsubara. Chinese, Indian, Spanish, and English – he can translate these languages. It was an incredible skill to do that job. He was a nice person. They said I look like him. People who saw him before said he's a good person. I'm sure he was.

Like Osawa, Eloisa, a *yonsei* from Manila, claimed that her great grandfather was also an interpreter. In her narrative, Eloisa said her ancestor was brought by the Japanese military to the Philippines before the war. Eventually, her great grandfather fell in love with a Filipina, her great grandmother. When the war broke out, her great grandfather refused to go back to Japan, but the government ordered him to repatriate. Thus, Eloisa's great grandfather boarded the ship to Japan, leaving behind his wife and children. Eloisa's narrative indicates the lack of "agency" of her grandfather to resist government orders. At one point, she stressed that



her great grandparents “were victims of war.” Asked to clarify, she responded that “the war had separated him from his Filipino family. He had no other choice but to obey his government, because disobedience was not acceptable during his time.”

A grandfather of another *nikkeijin*, Simon, was instrumental to the Japanese war effort, but Simon stressed that his ancestor was a peace-loving person who wanted reconciliation rather than conflict.

My grandfather came to the Philippines when he was 16 or 17 years old. He was a spy of the Japanese Imperial Army during the war. He worked in the Philippines as a spy, until the time he married my grandmother who was a Filipina. My auntie, who was still very young that time, wondered why there were so many Japanese meeting in our house. They had a huge house. That time, my grandmother owned a large truck which delivered cargoes. Aside from this land cargo business, my grandma also owned a bakery – so they were pretty much earning well. My auntie was so confused every time my dad gathered a group of Japanese secretly inside their house in Pampanga. It was a weekly meeting, usually on the ground floor.

Then my grandfather spoke to his children and talked about a war that would be launched by Japan. My grandfather said, ‘I don’t want this to happen. This must not happen! I want to die before this war starts.’ My aunt told us that our grandfather loved the Filipinos, and one evidence is the fact that he married a Filipina. At the same time, my grandfather was also well-loved by the Filipinos. He was a very nice person, you know.

Simon’s grandfather got his wish, dying from a pulmonary disease few days before the war broke out. Melay has a similar story to Simon’s. A *nikkeijin* from Sorsogon, she was proud of her grandfather.

There are many stories about my grandfather. That was world war, and my grandfather joined the military. They were planning to

‘conquer the world.’ My grandfather served as a spy. He worked with them for thirteen years, and even before the war he was already here in the Philippines. But I saw his picture, and I can tell that he was not that kind of person.

My grandfather met my grandmother in Sorsogon. They got married and had seven children. They were living peacefully, and they had business, until the war broke out.

During the war, four children were able to go to Japan, but the three, including my mother, were left in the Philippines. They said my grandfather stayed here during the war, and he was not even killed by the guerillas because he was a good person. They (guerillas) protected him (grandfather) because he was a kind person... he shouldn’t be killed, and he should be allowed to go back to Japan. And so, he safely returned to his home.

The narratives of the Filipino nikkeijin demonstrate an interesting process of reconciling their knowledge of the horrific events of the Second World War on the one hand, and the character and involvement of their ancestors in the conflict, on the other. Instead of defending the Japanese soldiers, the narratives highlighted the passive role of their ancestors. In some narratives, the ancestor was even depicted as a ‘victim’ because of the unfortunate events that occurred after their surrender. Consider Robert’s story about his great grandfather.

“...he helped many Filipinos. When he encountered a starving Filipino, he secretly gave bread or anything edible in his pocket. There were so many bad Japanese soldiers, but my great grandfather was different. He loved the Filipinos. Other Japanese killed Filipinos, but he helped them survive during the war. But because he was a Japanese soldier, they thought he was bad. He got killed in Bulacan. It’s really sad that we tend to generalize them... We judged them. But there were good souls who fought during the war.”

The stories of benevolent soldiers have several versions from different narrators, but they all had an underlying theme: a presentation of a positive image of the ancestor. The stories, molded by emotional narrators, have been established as a collective memory of the clan to inspire the next generation of descendants.

### My Hardworking Great Grandfather

The sansei and yonsei *nikkeijin* also see their ancestors as hardworking. Vina still recalls the stories of her parents about her grandfather who was brought to the Philippines to build dikes. Her great grandfather, named Teruichi Okuoka from Chiba, arrived in the Philippines when he was still 18. Vina has limited knowledge of her ancestral roots, but she was certain that this ancestor worked so hard for the sake of his family. “He was so young, but he sacrificed a lot. He was poor, but he never gave up. He rose from rags to riches.”

For the *nikkeijin* that I interviewed, stories about pre-war prosperity and intercultural harmony are recurrent. For Dave, marriage with a Filipina symbolizes a boundless partnership between two cultures. Dave does not know what exactly his great grandfather did for a living, but his parents knew that he was a laborer who spent some years in the Philippines before the war. His ancestor got married to a ‘Bagobo’ native and worked in a farm. They had children, one of whom was Dave’s grandfather.

The war broke out. My great grandfather was left in the Philippines. During the war, he was still very young, and he got lost somewhere. They said he got really sick, to the point that he was about to die. But somebody saw him. They helped him... they took him to a medical facility, and they hosted him after recovering from sickness. Eventually, he worked as a farmer. He married a Filipina.

Dave’s great grandfather died in Hawaii, and his grandfather was left in the Philippines. His grandfather’s brother asked him to migrate to Japan and discover his own cultural roots. However, he refused to leave the Philippines

because of his emotional attachment to the people and the country. Dave's grandfather loved the Philippines so much that he was no longer willing to repatriate to Japan. He still communicated with his brother in Japan, but he was not interested to live in any country other than the Philippines.

Chesca shared her limited knowledge of her grandfather who worked in a plantation company in Davao.

I really don't know when, how, and why he came to the Philippines. I've heard from my parents that he used to work in a plantation. He's a Japanese from Okinawa, but I could imagine how he dealt with the local people. That was before the war, so they were still living peacefully without any animosity or whatsoever. When the war broke out, they started to hate the Japanese, and my grandfather had to hide from those Filipinos who hated them. Well, they said they 'kill' every Japanese that time. They needed to hide.

David's and Chesca's accounts highlight the harmonious relationship between Filipinos and Japan before the war. David went further, stressing that Filipinos loved his grandfather, and Chesca also shares how her grandfather escaped from the wrath of the nationalistic, anti-Japanese Filipinos.

There are also accounts of laborers who were recruited to the Japanese military when the war broke out. During the military rule between January 1942 and early 1945, almost all issei and some nisei were enlisted as soldiers or paramilitary personnel or 'gunzoku' for the Japanese forces. Failure to participate in the military entailed severe punishment or even execution (Ohno 2007, 247). Antoniette's grandfather, for instance, was forced to join the military.

His name is Yuchi Fujimoto, and he was named in the Philippines as Manuel Kuizon. He was sent to the Philippines as one of the Japanese laborers for the Kennon Road construction. After the road was done, he went to Leyte and there he met his wife Sofia. When the Second World War broke out, he was caught early because it was already known to the public that he was a Japanese soldier.

Antoniette and other *nikkeijin* tell similar stories. For them, their forefathers were victims of forced labor. Laborers, usually construction workers, plantation workers, or simple farmers were imagined as wartime sacrificial lambs. They bore the punishment of the war, lost everything, and took to hiding in spite of their ‘non-voluntary involvement’ in the Japanese occupation. For the *sansei* and *yonsei*, their ancestors were innocent actors who were only concerned about their livelihood, but inevitably faced anti-Japanese sentiments of the Filipinos despite their benevolent deeds.

### My Grandma was a “Haponesa”

While the narratives are dominated by the ‘Japanese grandfather figure,’ some *nikkeijin* have a Filipino grandfather and a Japanese grandmother. The common theme in these stories is that of a ‘Japanese lady’ who goes with her Filipino lover and leaves her family in Japan, who eventually disowns her.

The stories of these *nikkeijin* have a contextual background different from the accounts of the laborers and soldiers who came to the Philippines prior to the Second World War. These women from Okinawa, the would-be great grandmothers of today’s *nikkeijin*, used to work in American bases in Japan before travelling to the Philippines. They married their Filipino partners who were their co-workers. Ultimately, these women and their husbands moved to the Philippines in the 1950s, expecting a new beginning and a life different from that in Okinawa (Maehara 2001). Their experiences in the Philippines, however, are rather comparable to those of other first-generation migrants from mainland Japan who refused to leave the Philippines. Consider the interesting story of Ced.

He (his grandfather) actually worked at the US airbase in Okinawa. There, he met my grandma. They had a relationship, despite the fact that the two nations, during that time, were still ‘bitter’ against each other because of the war. It was a kind of animosity that was evident in every Japanese family. That time, the Japanese were the losers of the war... and they really hated the foreigners. My grandpa felt that.

Grandma and grandpa decided to live in an apartment in Okinawa. The family of my grandma was angry, and threatened to disown her. She still refused to listen to her parents. She secretly stayed with my grandpa, until my grandma's family started to search for her. The family tried to look for both of them.

They decided to move to the Philippines. That was in 1955. My grandma liked the place and the people, and she converted to Catholicism. My grandma started to write letters to her family in Okinawa, but all letters were sent back. They rejected even the packages of dried mangoes and stuff. For 20 long years, her family rejected everything that came from her. She was disowned by her own family.

Ced knew that he was a *nikkeijin*. When Japanese companies recruited for the descendants of Japanese nationals in the Philippines, he immediately applied for a job. He sought assistance from a recruitment agency to locate the *kosekitohon* (certified true copy of family registration) of his mother in Okinawa. Eventually, the agency contacted his mother's family in Okinawa, and his mother's sister agreed to help them. After several decades, his grandmother and her sisters talked to him over the phone. Ced served as the bridge to reconnect her mother to her Okinawan roots.

Eric, whose grandmother is presently living in the Philippines, shared the story of his grandmother who was totally disconnected from her family until the present time.

She came from Okinawa. She decided to go to the Philippines with my grandfather. That's what love does, right? So, against all odds (laugh). That infuriated her family in Japan. They despised her. They didn't talk to her. Even her share of the family's land was given to another relative. Nothing was left for her.

These narratives present another example of the victimization of the *nikkei* ancestors. Facing fear and uncertainty, Eric's grandmother endured a hard life in the Philippines, worsened by the persecution of the public against the Japanese. She found herself helpless because her family in Japan

refused to forgive her disobedience. Hers is a painful story that inspired and taught her nikkeijin descendants the lessons of life, love, and sacrifice.

This section has focused on the gendered circumstances of some of the nikkeijin's Okinawan ancestors. As women, they chose to live with their husbands in the Philippines, accepting the consequences of those actions on their relationships with their families and communities in Okinawa. Interestingly, the narratives also emphasize themes of friendship and coexistence, attempt to shape a collective memory of cultural friendship, and promote an interesting thesis: that their Japanese ancestors truly loved the Philippines, including its society, people, religion, and culture.

### **Tales of Suffering and Persecution**

Filipino nikkeijin, most especially the first and second generations, experienced the fury of Filipino nationals against the Japanese forces after the Second World War. Following Japan's formal surrender on 2 September 1945, thousands of Japanese nationals including laborers, military and paramilitary personnel had to repatriate, leaving behind their Filipino wives and children. Those who were left in the Philippines faced severe persecution from Filipino nationalists who blamed them for the wartime crimes committed by Japan.

One of the Japanese repatriates to Japan after the war, Mr. Mamoru Tanaka, wrote an essay about his experiences before leaving the Philippines. He recalled how hard it was to leave his family in the Philippines for the sake of their safety. According to Tanaka, leaving the family was the only way to protect them; if not, then his wife Juana and his child Toshiyuki would be guilty by association, and the Filipino guerrillas might harm them. Leaving them, according to him, was the only way to avoid persecution. With a heavy heart, Tanaka wrote that

My thoughts were confused. My heart was heavy. I could not understand. I need to understand. Why would Juana want to remain behind when it would be dangerous for her to do so? The war was over, yes, but the

hatred toward the Japanese by Filipino guerillas has not abated, nor would it stop soon. The Japanese atrocities committed during the war are still fresh in their hearts. I never took part in those violent acts; we are mere victims of the war (Khanser and Dela Pena 2009, 2).

In the following section, nikkeijin emphasize the unenviable condition of being persecuted. They share narratives of oppression and relate it to the failure of the emergence of nikkeijin solidarity in the Philippines.

### Social Discrimination after the War

Nikkeijin usually attribute their limited knowledge of their Japanese heritage to the events during the war. Understandably, these nikkeijin were raised in a social environment where their Japanese identity was kept hidden. Although most of my interviewees belonging to the third- and fourth- generations (both de facto and upgraded) did not experience such kind of social discrimination in the Philippines, a few can vividly recall how their parents or grandparents were maltreated after the war. For instance, Eric, a nikkei from Manila, recounted the sufferings of his grandmother. Socially isolated, his grandmother exhibited mental instability, a reason that hindered her from going back to Japan to visit her sisters. Those experiences prevented her from talking about Japanese culture and society to her children and grandchildren. Since childhood, Eric's parents have embraced Filipino identity as though they did not have mixed roots/parentage, and they have no intention of going to Japan. Eric's Okinawan grandmother's story is deeply moving.

My grandmother is still in the Philippines. She's now considered as TNT (illegal migrant). She can still speak Hogen (dialect). She can still write Japanese. Look at her picture, here... She's dark, her back is twisted, and you know, she lost some fingers. She had experienced being hit by a car when she got lost in Mindoro. It's a long story, Ron. But basically there was a point in her life when she was 'palabay-labay' (moving from one place to another). Her mentality is now



quite different, maybe unstable. Well, she has experienced being discriminated ('na-ijime siya sa Pilipinas') in the Philippines. From the time when my grandfather married another wife, she moved away from us...That time, she could not speak fluent Tagalog, so people were tricking her whenever she buys, for example, 'Galunggong' from the market...they overprice the Galunggong for her. Then of course, people would make fun of her. She was very unhappy. She couldn't talk to anyone because nobody, during that time, spoke Japanese.

Eric's grandmother was isolated and depressed during her first few years in the Philippines. Apart from a broken marriage, her sister in Japan decided to seize all her properties in Okinawa. Emotionally devastated by these painful experiences, Eric's grandmother became mentally unstable.

Other *nikkeijin* also claimed that their grandparents, parents, and even themselves had to contend with verbal harassment and teasing. Mel also recalled that

Our grandfather used to teach my parents how to speak and read Japanese. He had given a Japanese name to some of his daughters. But after the war, it was such a disadvantage to reveal your identity as a Japanese. It was a shame ('ikinahihiya') to reveal that you have Japanese relatives. They were cursed by the Filipinos! Filipinos gave names, called them killers, murderers...Well you know why. You know what my father did? He distanced himself from us. He stayed away from us, so that we (his children) wouldn't be identified with him (because he obviously looked like Japanese).

I was psychologically affected by those curses. And I knew that my mother was also psychologically tormented. She became too defensive. She was too defensive in dealing with other people, especially with our neighbors. She was harmless, she didn't say anything, but she remained aloof from the people. She tended to divert the discussion everytime there was an issue about the war, the soldiers, and the occupation.

The widespread prejudice and harassment against *nikkeijin* forced many parents to either change or withhold the Japanese name of their children. The word “Hapon,” which literally refers to Japanese nationals, acquired a negative connotation, and the term and its referents were mocked and insulted by the locals after the war. “Altogether, fears of social ostracism, if not reprisal for direct or indirect association with atrocities and collaboration during the occupation as well as a sense of humiliation of national defeat and international condemnation led them to deny, sublimate or hide their Japanese identity and heritage” (Mabunay 2006, 16). For Mina, being called “Hapon” is neither a slur nor harassment. But she wondered why her brothers got into trouble because of the label.

Our family is known as ‘Hapon’ in our town. ‘Hapon! Hapon!’ that’s how our playmates called us when we were kids. I didn’t feel offended whenever they would call us Hapon. But my brothers got into trouble because they felt being harassed. I actually heard some words like, ‘you don’t belong here! Go back to Japan, you don’t belong here.’ Oh, that was actually offensive.

The term “Hapon” was associated to being a “collaborator” during the war. But even until the 1970s and 1980s, it retained its negative connotation, albeit with some modifications that reflect new realities:

I was silent throughout our ride back to the boarding house. I usually feigned my emotions when conversations drifted to Japanese atrocities against the Filipinos. Yes I am a Japanese descendant. The kind of slit in my eyes told everyone that I was one. But who wants to be identified with the aggressors of a horrible world war? I do not want to be called a *Yakuza* (syndicate). Or a *Japayuki-san*. Or a granddaughter of a Filipina comfort woman. These are common Filipino images of the Japanese. (Khanser & Dela Pena 2009, 14)

Although anti-Japanese sentiments have already subsided in Philippine society, *nikkeijin*, like the *yonsei* who wrote the account above,

still feel the social stigma and prejudice of the majority. The label “Hapon” is no longer related to being a traitor or a war aggressor; it now connotes a relation to an entertainer or a club hostess in Japan (*japayuki*), a Japanese gang/syndicate member (*yakuza*), or a grandchild of a comfort woman. The current negative and sexist images of Japan have also been imparted to the *nikkeijin*.

Indeed, despite significant improvement in Japan’s image in the decades after the war, popular ideas and discourses on the country and its people remain unconstructive. These include the *Japayukis*, the struggle of the comfort women, and the proliferation of *yakuza* activities in the country. Since these realities embody the Filipino experience of Japan, they have also affected the image of *nikkeijin*. Clearly, *nikkeijin*’s cultural engagement and interaction within the Philippines have shaped their consciousness and identity, and such negative ethnic attributions may help explain why the descendants narrate their stories from the discourse of victimhood and deprivation.

### Economic Deprivation

Anti-Japanese sentiment after the war forced *nikkeijin* to hide in the woods or in the rural areas where local people accepted them. There are accounts of locals stealing *nikkeijin*’s properties, and of local officials confiscating lands and financial savings, the fruits of their hard work and perseverance before the war. The narrative of Teresita illustrates the impact of this deprivation.

They (her great grandparents) were well off, considering that they had a huge farm. Business was running well until the war ruined everything. What is even more frustrating is that, everything, including the rice field, and the large house where they lived before the war were gone. They (Filipino authorities) took it from us. My grandparents had to struggle and start from zero. It was very frustrating on their part. And from that time, they lived in poverty.

Another nikkeijin from Sorsogon named Gracia narrated her ancestor's experience.

My grandfather was a businessman. He was one of the trusted entrepreneurs in their town. They said he was a nice person... and very passionate in what he was doing. He was just staying in his office all day long, counting money. Very business-minded. They had their own candy factory. My grandmother was really good in making candies, and my grandfather was good at managing it. The business went well, and my aunts and uncles had experienced all the good things in life. Suddenly, the war broke out, and that ended everything. They (unknown Filipinos) seized everything in the factory. They stole everything. Everything had vanished, nothing was left. From that time, they experienced utmost poverty. They really suffered... but luckily they survived.

Teresita and Gracia's accounts represent the economic downfall of the nikkeijin because of the anger against the Japanese after the war. The first Japanese emigrants who worked so hard in plantations, farms, and even construction roads in the early 1900s transformed their families to middleclass and upperclass entrepreneurs who purchased large farms, factories, and commercial facilities. It is thus unsurprising that another nikkeijin, Ellen, says that her ancestor "was a millionaire..." or that James describe his great grandfather as "super, super rich..." Possibly an exaggeration, those accounts merely prove how sansei and yonsei perceive their ancestors as successful individuals who escaped the poverty that they endured before migrating to the Philippines.

It is interesting to emphasize that the counterparts of Filipino nikkeijin in Latin America, specifically the Brazilian-Japanese (see Roth 2002) are relatively well-off in terms of economic status compared to Filipino nikkeijin. These Brazilian nikkeijin, usually belonging to the middle class, are more highly educated than the locals. There is a general perception among Brazilians nationals that the Japanese-Brazilians are rich. "A marriage with a nikkeijin man is understood in Brazilian society to be *garantido* (guaranteed), that is, economically secure" (Tsuda 2003, 66).

On the contrary, *nikkeijin* in the Philippines experienced extreme poverty after the war. It was only after the first-generation of migrants who entered Japan in the 1990s, when the fruits of the remittances reached the second- and third-generation, that the socioeconomic well-being of the younger *nikkeijin* improved. Later generations have depended on the older generation for their education, small business, and even necessities. Riza, a *nikkeijin* from Davao shares that

My great grandparents were very poor. My great grandfather who previously worked in Okinawa, and my great grandmother, an Okinawan, decided to plant crops for a living. Before the war, the farm was doing well. After the war, they hid somewhere in Negros but the constant drought starved them. I've heard about their financial struggle at that time—that they were only having a meal in a day, or they were eating rice and farm veggies. So, our family was very poor. Luckily, in the 1990s, my grandparents were able to work in Japan. That transformed our lives. Later on, my aunties and uncle also left the Philippines to work in Hamamatsu. They somehow supported my parent's small store and also my education.

This anecdote about Riza's great grandparents is a typical success story among Filipino *nikkeijin*. Many *sansei* interviewees revealed that they were fortunate enough to be supported by second-generation relatives. Many *nikkeijin* from rural regions also experienced economic struggle until they were given opportunity to work in Japan.

### **Ancestral Narratives as Identity Marker**

Receiving the privilege to reside and work in Japan eased the economic struggles of the *sansei* and *yonsei*. Most *nikkeijin* found jobs in factories which offered much more than what their blue-collar jobs could offer in the Philippines. In a way, they seem to have regained what their ancestors lost by being identified as Japanese in the Philippines. Culturally, however, the struggle for acceptance remains. Factory jobs, while brokered

by fellow nikkeijin relatives who work with them, have also brought them alongside the Japanese people. In this environment, their similarities and differences are inevitably highlighted, reviving anew the struggle for acceptance that their Japanese ancestors experienced in the Philippines. And just as their ancestral narratives proved to be handy in defending themselves against the negative image of what being partly “Hapon” meant back home, these narratives likewise become useful in establishing their Japaneseness when challenged by the natives themselves. Jenna shared one of her most unforgettable encounters with her Japanese boss.

The leader in our *kaisha* (company) told me, “hmmm... I guess you’re also carrying a fake visa...you just bought that, didn’t you?” I was shocked. Then he explained, “Well, everytime I ask a Filipino nikkeijin about the hometown of their ancestor, the response was always Okinawa, Okinawa, Okinawa... everybody is from Okinawa? Is that even possible?” I told the leader, “hey, it’s true that many Filipinos have bought a fake visa. But remember, not all Filipinos are carrying fake visas. Not all. Do not generalize. We are not like them.” To convince him, I even showed the picture of our first-generation relative. I told him the story of my ancestor. I told him all the details that I knew about my Japanese grandfather. That is the only way to prove that I am a true nikkeijin.

While it is difficult to establish with certainty the effect of these interactions on the ancestral narratives, one can surmise, by deducing from Kinoshita’s theory, that interactions with fellow nikkeijin on one hand can possibly shape these narratives in casual conversations, where each would inevitably share stories about their ancestors and get to know fellow nikkeijin better. This could potentially solidify ancestral narratives as collective memory. On the other hand, challenges to their nikkeijin identity as relayed by Jenna, trigger a defensiveness that makes retelling ancestral narratives all the more important not just in establishing identity, but also in proving their entitlement to the privileges granted to them as nikkeijin.

## Conclusion

This paper examines the images of Japanese ancestors from the stories of the third- and fourth-generation *nikkeijin*. Grounding my analysis on Kinoshita's (2003) storied identities, I hypothesized that the narratives are similar to Kinoshita's collection of stories which were "culturally elaborated representations of collective identities that are continuously and consciously reproduced and redefined within the social world of the Japanese American elderly in Puna" (222). Collective memory, then, is an "interpretation of the past based on shared knowledge of current and past social and cultural contexts" (227). In the case of my *sansei* and *yonsei* respondents, their narratives were continuously shaped by social interactions with parents and grandparents, relatives and friends, fellow *nikkeijin* in the Philippines and Japan, foreign migrants, and even their Japanese employers. As Kinoshita reminds his readers, such stories are highly "contextualized" (4). For Philippine *nikkeijin*, the themes are nuanced by their situation as labor migrants, factory workers, children and grandchildren of discriminated and unrecognized *nikkei* group, and descendants of those who orchestrated the war. Their everyday experiences in either the Philippines or Japan, within or beyond their workplaces, reinforce their proclivity to tell these stories and convey the collective sentiments of the younger generation *nikkeijin*. Indeed, these narratives exhibit elements of storied identities, a schema of collective memories that articulate their meaningfulness in different contexts such as ethnicity, class, generation, and even gender. The narratives also articulate their identity as a people, a discourse created within the transnational spaces of Japan and the Philippines in response to their experiences of marginalization. Through the narratives, they uphold their *nikkeijin* status by emphasizing their Japanese connection. Also, they make sense of their embeddedness in the social and economic infrastructure of Japanese society.

Given the aforementioned contextualizations, my *nikkeijin* interviewees highlight the positive rather than the negative, the unknown rather than the popular, and the constructive rather than the offensive.

They told narratives that depict the pre-war emigrants as benevolent, concerned, and generous Japanese nationals. Dominant images of the ancestors are soldiers and members of the paramilitary groups, construction workers and farmers, and Japanese wives who joined their Filipino husbands in the Philippines. In these groups, the ancestors were described in a positive light, highlighting their noble qualities and simplicity. The stories also underscore the peaceful coexistence and the virtuous role of their ancestors in bridging and harmonizing both cultures.

It is also evident from the narratives that the third-and fourth-generation nikkeijin view their ancestors as “victims” of various circumstances. Post-war Philippine society blamed these ancestors for their participation with the Japanese aggressors, even if they themselves did not actually carry out atrocities. Interestingly, the narrative of victimhood also resonates in the current political discourses in Japan as “many Japanese nationals regard themselves as victims of the Second World War and few recall the sustained victimization of neighboring countries” (Kingston 2011, 40). Critics have called it “selective amnesia” of Japanese policymakers, but the nuances differ in the case of nikkeijin storytellers. While right-wing politicians adhere to their nationalist principles, my nikkeijin interviewees narrate their stories as Filipinos who relate to and contrast such narratives with popular historical discourse. They take a cautious stance as they interact with fellow Filipinos or even Japanese who know a different version of war-time narratives. In other words, the nikkeijin narratives were told from the Filipino perspective, which deviates from upholding or justifying the wartime behavior of the Japanese. Instead, they speak on behalf of their nikkeijin families who have kept a heroic account of the ancestors. The stories, they believe, are factual and truthful as the accounts came from their parents and grandparents. For them, it is about time to narrate the unspoken stories as the society becomes more willing to listen and understand the alternative discourses of history.



## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> According to Kinoshita, the title “Storied Identities” suggests that the stories are self-reflexive texts used by his research subjects “to communicate with each other and intelligibly delineate their peoplehood.” He argues that storied identities are “culturally elaborated representations of collective identities that are continuously and consciously reproduced and redefined within the social world of Japanese American elderly in Puna” (Kinoshita 2003).
- <sup>2</sup> Generation upgrading is a legal process of converting generation level through registration or acquisition of a new *koseki*. Through this process, the second-generation *nikkeijin* converts his/her status to first-generation by applying for another *koseki* (family registry). This would entitle their grandchildren (who are de facto fourth-generation) to become third-generation; hence eligible to apply for a Japanese visa. The third-generation becomes second-generation, while the fourth-generation becomes third-generation descendants, thereby qualifying them to enter and work in Japan.

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