

PHILIPPINE-JAPAN CULTURAL RELATIONS: A FILIPINO VIEW*

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Introduction

Philippine socio-cultural relations with Japan has gone a long way from the era of hostilities in the 1940s. The relations have undergone improvement since then. In fact, it has metamorphosed into something very congenial, characterized by mutual respect for each other's people and culture and for each other's achievements as independent nation-states.

Several factors accounted for the change in the state of cultural affairs and social relations between the two countries. Japanese presence in the Philippines — just like perhaps in other ASEAN member-states — fits nicely with the latter countries' needs. Its economic penetration of the region, for instance, coincided with the Philippines' and perhaps her ASEAN partners' requirements for additional factors needed to push their economic growth and development performance upwards. Such performance perforce served as a basis of social and political stability.

To illustrate this, firstly, Japan's needs for raw materials for its industries and markets for her industrial goods are matched by Southeast Asia's search for markets of its commodity exports, and a constant source of financial and technological resources.

Secondly, other Southeast Asian goals outside of domestic economic and political stability in the 1960s and beyond have been pursued. The diversification of their external economic and political relations, for instance, were gaining grounds, simultaneous with the booming of Japanese industries amidst the waning bipolar world.

As world bipolarity began to wane, Third World nations including the Philippines tried flexing their collective strength in various international forums. They pursued the new international economic order (NIEO). The rhetorics of Third World goals even became louder and clearer during the post-

*Paper delivered at the Intra-Universities Seminar on ASEAN-Japan Relations, Padjajaran University, Bandung City, Indonesia, July, 1989.

Vietnam War settlement as they emerged victoriously in numerous UN decision-making processes.

This paper submits to the notion that bilateral cultural ties form part of a larger framework of bilateral relations. This is in view of the fact that growing complexities in the relations of nations have given rise to very stiff competition for markets, raw materials, financial resources, technology, official development assistance (ODA) and scholarships and grants.

It may be recalled (although this is never an analogy that would lead to the same consequence) that the growing competition among Western colonial countries by the mid-nineteenth century (as an offshoot of the industrial revolution in Europe and the altered nature and character of politics and social classes) led to the actual conquest of Asian hinterlands. Before that, but with lesser competition for trade items such as spices, silk and others, these same countries limited themselves to holding and controlling strategically-located islands and cities in Asia: Bombay, Madras, Calcutta, Penang, Singapore, Malacca, Java, Labuan, Balambangan, Macao, and Hongkong, to name a few.

Colonialism is dead, but the goals which nations seek to attain through securing trade items, markets, financial and technological resources have largely remained the same. This is true both from the industrialized and developing countries' perspectives. The goals of development and economic primacy need more than friendly ties. Based on friendship and cultural ties, national objectives abroad are assured. This assumption has been proven. A study of South-South investments, for instance, revealed that cultural affinities and special political ties served as foundation for strong economic relations. This appears very important especially during initial phases of relations after independence is gained.¹

Smooth cultural relations during the past centuries have some of the elements for maintaining good, productive, and mutually satisfactory relations. All other factors being equal, close cultural ties serve as a 'clincher' for closer bilateral relations.

Philippine-Japan bilateral cultural relation programs can be categorized under the following: a) those that are handled by government agencies; b) those that are pursued more or less permanently by private international organizations; and c) those that are sponsored by private institutions.

The aspect of culture playing a positive role in the implementation of developmental projects in the Philippines has been included, in consonance with the overall thrust of this paper. It is a recognition both of the Filipinos' trust and confidence on Japanese economic or technological assistance and the Japanese capacity to understand Filipinos culturally that this phenomenon developed.

Government-to-Government Scholarships and Grants

Comprehensive official educational and cultural exchange programs between the Philippines and Japan exist and operate in various forms. Oftentimes appearing as part of a bigger program involving the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the exchanges underpin the rather voluminous economic, political and cultural relations. Some of these educational and cultural programs are under the umbrella of the Japan-ASEAN Comprehensive Exchange Program (JACEP) which has the following features: a) the establishment of the Center for the Promotion of Cultural Exchanges between Japan and ASEAN; and b) the exchange of scholars, cultural performers, etc. under the Japan-ASEAN Exchange Projects.

From the Philippine point-of-view, the pre-JACEP projects and those that were implemented during the period of JACEP programs yielded volumes of scholarships and grants as well as other forms of educational and cultural exchanges.

Cultural ties between the Philippines and Japan started to pick up at the opening of the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) in 1969, during which the Japanese presented the famous opera "Yuzuru" by the foremost composer Ikuma Dan with a complete cast of Japanese artists. This was soon followed by a series of concerts under the sponsorship of the Japan Foundation. Several outstanding artists performed during the series, namely ballerina Yoko Morishita, saxophonist Sadao Watanabe, composer Ikuma Dan, and conductor Yoshinao Osawa. The Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra and the Buyo Classical Dance and Drama Troupe likewise came to the Philippines to perform.

The Japan Foundation and the Japan Cultural Aid Program gave a number of grants which benefited the Metropolitan Manila Commission, the Cagayan State University, and the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sports.

Another important institution that has been active in this regard was the Philippines-Japan Cultural Institute which was established in 1978 as a non-stock, non-profit private organization. The organization's beneficiaries include

Philippine universities and colleges, churches, the Ministry of Tourism, and other entities.

In the past few years, the Institute has presented performances by various Japanese cultural missions including Ikebana flower arrangements and Japanese Tea Ceremony demonstrations. Other programs of similar significance were also undertaken.

Another interesting program in this regard concerns educational exchanges. Filipino scholars' countries of destination have been rationalized (as shown in a NEDA study) especially in 1988 in view of the economic recovery program of the Aquino Administration which was launched in 1986.

Table 1 presents the number of scholarships in Japan and in other countries availed of by Filipino students. It is interesting to note that during the decade of the 80s, Japan has been on top of these countries which play host to Filipino scholars. Tables 2 and 3 show the structure of Philippines trade and investment relations.

Table 1
Filipino Availment of Scholarships/Grants Abroad, 1981, 1983, 1987

Countries	No. of Slots			Remarks		
	1981	1983	1987	1981	1983	1987
Japan	244	285	156	2nd	1st	1st
USA	261	256	89	1st	2nd	2nd
Southeast Asian Countries						
Indonesia	41	25	23	4th		
Malaysia	37	93	86	4th	3rd	
Thailand	82	124	68	3rd	3rd	4th
Singapore	40	68	49			
South Asian Countries						
India	39	46	26	5th		
Pakistan	1	1	5			
Bangladesh	5	6	3			
Socialist Countries						
PROC	18	31	9			
USSR	6	10	8			

Source: Philippine National Economic and Development Authority.

Table 2
Philippines' Trade With Japan (in million US dollars)

	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
Export	1022	1046	1876	853	984	1424
Imports	1266	815	735	868	1121	1421
Balance	(244)	232	(141)	(15)	(137)	3

Source: "Trade Relations between RP and Japan" Philippine Daily Inquirer, May 6, 1989

Table 3
Japanese Investments in RP (BOI-Approved)
(in million US dollars)

Year	Amount	Percentage
1985	568	14.6
1986	485	19.8
1987	454	28.5
1988	591	17.2

Source: "Trade Relations Between RP and Japan" Philippine Daily Inquirer, May 6, 1989

The way economic and cultural relations between the Philippines and Japan are going clearly substantiate our earlier contention. That is, there is a certainty that economic relations are largely reflected in the cultural aspects of bilateral relations.

As shown in official Philippine foreign affairs programs, cultural relations with Japan consists of programs such as a) National Parks Development (Japan-funded); b) Scholarships availed of by Filipinos, and c) the ASEAN-Japan Friendship Program and Ship for Southeast Asian Youth Program.

Insofar as the officially-sanctioned scholarships are concerned, there have been more than 100 slots available.³

Social Dimensions

The social dimensions of bilateral relations consist primarily of Filipino migrant workers to Japan, aliens (Japanese visitors) given temporary or permanent permit to stay, and foreign students. Data on these aspects have been considered as the indicators of social relations.

Filipino migrant labor to Japan are of two types: sea-based and land-based.

Filipino seamen during the period 1982-1986 had the following countries as their favorite destination: Singapore, Japan, and the United States. During that period, Filipino seamen who were employed in Singapore numbered 13,733. Those who went to Japan and the United States numbered 7,064 and 4,643, respectively. On record, only two other countries employed a significant number of Filipino seamen during the period, namely, Thailand and Maldives.

The land-based Filipino workers' preferred places of employment are Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Iraq, and other West Asian countries. At one time, Saudi Arabia employed no less than 150,000 Filipino workers.

In Southeast Asia, the top countries of destination for Filipino land-based workers are Singapore and Brunei. Singapore employed 9,036 Filipinos in 1983; 8,424 in 1984; 11,147 in 1985; and 15,994 in 1986.

Japan's position in this regard lies in between of Saudi Arabia (the number one employer) and Singapore. In 1982, Japan employed 13,685 Filipino contract workers; 13,068 in 1984; and 26,620 in 1986.

In the Philippines, 1979 and 1980 data show that the Japanese, in terms of magnitude, comprised the largest number among aliens who were given permits to stay in the country. In both years, there were 222 Japanese executives,

managers, consultants and professionals out of the total of 855 aliens in 1979 and 854 in 1980.

In 1979, there were only 157 Chinese, 104 British, 79 Americans and 58 Australians given permit to stay permanently in the country. In the following year, 1980, there were 171 Chinese, 108 British, 84 American, and 41 Australian visitors.⁴

During the 1987-1988 academic years, the number of foreign students in the Philippines indicated that not many Japanese youths study in the country. There were 464 Americans; 893 Thais; 544 Indonesians; 84 Malaysians; and 7 Singaporeans. The number of Japanese students reached only 62. The biggest number of foreign students in both school years were the Jordanians who numbered between 1,391 and 1,450 during the four semesters. Notably, it is only in this indicator that Japan is down the ladder.⁵

Official data on tourist arrivals have not yet been collated and processed. But initial impressions would show that the Japanese constitute the biggest number of tourists in the country, with Manila and Cebu cities (two highly urbanized areas) as their favorite destinations.

In social bilateral relations, therefore, Japan is rated first in terms of her importance to the Philippines.

Actual people-to-people contact serves as the true nuts-and-bolts of bilateral relations. It is through this that cultural or economic or political relations can be institutionalized.

In national decision-making situations, especially if there is a sense of urgency or extreme importance, the true feelings or perceptions of the people concerned count a lot. Decision-makers, leaders and statesmen give much consideration on it.

Thus, as indicators under transactionalist approach, the high-level transactions in terms of manpower movement, tourist flows, permits given to aliens for permanent or temporary stay and others indicate ever-growing bilateral ties between the Philippines and Japan. Incidentally, in a study of regional cooperation, the same trend indicates growing regionalism.

Culture as a Factor in Developmental Projects

The primacy of bilateral economic relations between the Philippines and Japan has to be accentuated even in the study of cultural relations. The economic dimensions of Philippine relations with Japan (which are, once more, stressed in the case of the Philippine Assistance Program) are so crucial that it cannot be over-emphasized. Thus, cultural factors in some developmental projects funded by Japan were looked into.

To start with, Japanese technicians and consultants in these development projects have been conscious of protocol and proper behavior. They normally paid courtesy calls to their counterparts: the technicians, planners, the city, provincial or town officials. Each group is usually led by a senior person (which is normally in accord with Japanese adherence to seniority in various endeavors).

In a pilot development project in Jalajala, Rizal for example, Japanese assistance appears in various categories. Technical cooperation has been pursued in terms of site selection, actual survey by land-use expert, training support for DAR personnel in Japan, agro-industrial feasibility studies, and so on.⁶ Various sectors have been involved such as the local government, the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), Meralco Foundation, a farmers' organization, Japanese missions, etc. Two types of Japanese missions came: one specific mission for the Jalajala project and the other, to know the DAR and its programs.

The implementation phase of the integrated project is yet to start but expectedly the Japanese will extensively exercise their cultural norms and values as the case may be.

The Bohol Integrated Development Project, already in its implementation stage, is another integrated area development project that has clear manifestations of Japanese cultural norms and values. This project, costing about 1,479,000,000 yen for farm infrastructures, technicians, training, procurement of materials and buildings, employs 3,000 farmer-leaders, 8 Japanese technicians, 23 Filipino trainees who were sent abroad and 502 trained locally. It covers practically the whole island-province.

The Bohol project is one of the most successful joint development projects between the Philippines and Japan. It is here, among other things, Japan's

cultural approaches are astoundingly successful.

The cultural strategy includes demonstration farms utilizing progressive farmers' land; the recruits being invited to the Agricultural Center for Research, Training and Extension (APO) which is also Japanese-funded; actual field visits and lectures; the use of Filipino materials in demonstrating Japanese agricultural technology; and others.

Japanese technicians, experts and consultants normally managed halting Visayan language and some even speak and understand Filipino. They have learned Filipino and English before and during their stint at U.P. Los Banos, famous campus for agricultural training and community development.⁷

Again, proper protocol, respect for Filipino cultural mores and practices, and gaining a solid understanding of their lives and problems have helped in the success of the project and undoubtedly the cultural and economic relations between the two nations have been put on firmer footing.

Culture and Business

In the Philippines, as in other parts of Asia, business has been pursued by the Japanese with due regard for the society and culture. "If the community doesn't welcome you, you will fail", a statement of Hiroshi Hamada, president of Ricoh Co., Ltd., seems to sum up that attitude. In fact, Japanese companies not only provide jobs - tens of thousands of them in Asia - but their managers work tirelessly to overcome cultural differences. The name of the game is cultural adjustment and acceptability to the community.

Japanese companies have also been considered sources of scholarships, grants, and donations. At first, these companies did not know how to react to such requests or proposals. But later on they began to adjust and accept the idea. They had to go through this process because charity giving is not the corporate way of life in Japan.

The Toyota Foundation, for example, has contributed to the giving of scholarship grants and awarding of a good number of academic projects. Other companies, in fact, now enjoy sponsoring cultural activities and sports events as integral part of public relations and marketing strategy.

Thus, it can be said that Japanese business in the Philippines, as elsewhere in Asia, has taken into account cultural and social adjustments in order to attain measure of success.⁸

The marriage between business and culture could be seen the other way around. It can be witnessed even more concretely in the proliferation of schools offering Japanese language courses in the cities and the growth in the number of "Japanese" restaurants. In these entities, cultural matters are the objects of business itself. These have affected the taste and linguistic capabilities of Filipinos.

In the Philippine setting, the impact is mostly felt among the middle classes and the literate population. This is a phenomenon observable in urbanized areas. In order to savor Japanese cuisine, one has to spend rather a big sum of money thus, only the ones with substantial disposable income can afford it. And the cuisine is available only in first and second class cities. Learning the Japanese language are pursued by those who intend to work in Japan: cultural dance troupe members, singers, music band members, and plain or skilled laborers who found employers in Japanese shipping yards or shipping companies and industrial plants.

In these latter examples, the adoption of Japanese culture leads to better employment or business opportunities.

Private Sector Participation: The Example of OISCA

The government-to-government social and cultural relations between the Philippines and Japan have its counterpart in the private sector. This is best exemplified by the projects and activities of the Organization for Industrial, Spiritual and Cultural Advancement (OISCA)-International.

As a private, international non-governmental organization operating in the Philippines, its mission is specific: to extend assistance for community and industrial development. It operates in practically all agriculturally-based economies of the tropical areas of Southern Asia: Papua New Guinea; Indonesia; Malaysia; Thailand; Bangladesh; Korea, Palau and the Philippines. Its projects are designed to help uplift the livelihood of varied communities — from sewing in Palawan, and day-care center in Negros Island, Philippines; to radish farming in Bangladesh, and to poultry-raising in Sabah, East Malaysia.

OISCA's greatest contribution to the development of culture and social relations between these developing countries and Japan is the youth exchange program. As an example, the youth exchanges between Filipinos and Japanese have contributed immensely to the achievement of great bilateral understanding. Every year, 50 Filipinos are brought to Japan to learn the Japanese language, train in agricultural techniques, visit historical places, and other activities. In return, Japanese youths are invited to the Philippines to visit similar places and community projects. During the past 12 years, OISCA-International successfully received and trained over 1,000 Filipino youth and adults in Japan. There were approximately 3,000 Japanese who came to the Philippines under the program.⁹

In pursuing its community-based projects in the Philippines, e.g., agro-forestry, youth and farmers training, development of farmers cooperatives, etc., OISCA has to tackle a number of problems. These include language barrier, people's attitude, and on the side of the Japanese, cultural and social adjustments.

The rules that OISCA has instilled in every one of its technicians and workers consist of an injunction to be hardworking, kind and hospitable — in order to set example to rural people.

Thus, the cultural approach is the unfailing guide for the success of OISCA's community-based projects in the aforementioned developing countries.

Present and Potential Problems

Philippine-Japan cultural relations faces one current problem and some potential ones. The current problem refers to the rising expectations of Filipinos who have had training or educational stint in Japan. The potential problems include the developing "dependency" of cultural relations upon economic relations; how to selectively adopt Japanese cultural practices; and the accurate presentation of Filipino culture in Japan.

Right now, an amorphous group of Filipinos who have had training or educational stint in Japan constitutes the discontented lot. After studying in Japanese educational institutions (combined perhaps with proper exposure to the various communities and cultural achievements of the country and, more importantly after having been used to modern ways of living. This group is having a hard time adjusting their lives in the Philippines. This group is now experiencing discontent over their salaries and limited upward mobility, except those who found employment in Japanese companies and other multinational

Table 4
Grant-Aid Program To The Philippines FY 1970-FY 1988
(Showing Cultural Grant)

FY I S A C R A L	General Grant (Mil. Yen)	Cultural Grant (Mil. Yen)	Food Aid (Mil. Yen)	Emer- gency Aid (Mil. Yen)	Aid for Increased Food Prodn. (Mil. Yen)	Total (Mil. Yen)	Total (Mil. US\$)	Exchange Rate (Yen to US\$)
1970	-	-	360	-	-	360	1	360.00
1971	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	360.00
1972	80	-	154	-	-	234	0.76	308.00
1973	-	-	308	-	-	308	1.13	272.84
1974	-	-	462	-	-	462	1.58	291.84
1975	-	7	-	-	-	7	0.02	297.04
1976	650	13	370	-	-	1033	3.48	296.50
1977	600	-	-	-	1300	1900	7.08	268.51
1978	1550	18	-	-	1900	3468	16.48	210.47
1979	2450	50	-	-	1900	4400	20.08	219.17
1980	2787	35	-	-	2000	4822	21.26	226.79
1981	3950	75	-	-	2000	6025	27.32	220.53
1982	4690	-	-	-	2100	6790	27.26	249.05
1983	5950	106	-	-	2300	8356	35.18	237.52
1984	5493	182	-	119	2500	8294	34.93	237.48
1985	5569	91	-	24	2500	8184	34.40	237.89
1986	6986	82	-	37	2900	10005	59.54	168.03
1987	7721	131	-	-	3140	10992	73.28	150.00
1988	9460	-	-	-	3140	12600	100.80	125.00
TOTAL	57939	790	1654	180	27680	88240	465.59	

Japanese Fiscal Year: 1 April to 31 March

Source: NEDA

corporations and UN agencies.

Among the potential problems, the more serious one is the perceived "dependency" of cultural ties upon trade and investment relations. Presently, it appears inevitable that should something catastrophic happens in the economic and business spheres, culture would suffer. How do we maintain high-level cultural links without considering the realities of economic ups and downs?

The potential problem appears very real and offers no solution at the moment.

Selective adoption of Japanese cultural practices has been confronted by some ASEAN nations a few years back. Specifically, the question of "Japanese-style management" has long been considered partly as a cultural problem rather than an issue in business management alone. Will Filipino managers and tech-

nicians involved in joint ventures, for instance, adopt Japanese strategies and techniques hook, line and sinker? If not, to what extent and which components?

In daily life, will Filipinos, in retracing Asian roots as factor for developing further the Filipino identity, adopt the Japanese view that one's life must blend with the environment? These and similar questions may be posed over and over again as we survey the cultural landscape and really try to find out how much acculturation can we afford vis-a-vis Japanese culture?

Finally, in preparing the Japanese for a stint in the Philippines, how can we accurately depict the country in Japan? This is no esoteric question, if we seriously plan to relate meaningfully, and in a mutually-satisfactory fashion, with that industrial nation. As the experience of many successful economies show, there is merit in emphasizing both positive and negative points as accurately as possible, so that economic planners as well as business strategists, investors and industrialists will know exactly what to expect in the Philippines.

Summary

Philippine-Japan cultural relations, an ever growing and ever improving field in Philippine foreign relations, has been found to undergird the two countries' growing economic relations. Since Japan has limited its political role in Asia¹⁰ and even much less in international military affairs since its rise as an economic giant, the cultural variable of that bilateral ties was only examined relative to economic relations which include technological assistance and grants both at government and private sectors level.

Since the cultural component undergirds bilateral economic relations, this can be taken as a barometer of present and future relations between the two countries.

Presently, there are a number of issues that leaders of both countries the Philippines and Japan must face squarely. One such question is to what extent should Filipinos — be they artists or economists or political strategists, etc. — understand and interpret Japanese mores and cultural values in order to benefit from economic, scientific and technology ties.

NOTES

¹Asok Desai, "The Forms of Foreign Investment in India" in Charles Oman (Editor), New Forms of International Investment In Developing Countries, OECD, Paris, 1984.

²Data and information have been provided by reliable sources, Asia-Pacific Office, R.P. Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), PICC Complex, Manila, June 1989.

³Artemio D. Palongpalong, Ph.D. Dissertation entitled "Philippines' Foreign Policy Towards Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan", University of the Philippines, Chapter III, pp. 24-29.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Minutes of Meeting for Feasibility Study on Integrated Jalajala Rural Development Project (signed by Mr. Satoshi Yamamoto, Team Leader of Preliminary Survey Team, JICA and Philip Ella Juico, Secretary, Department of Agrarian Reform, on April 17, 1989, Manila, Philippines). Please refer also to the Summary of Projects Proposed for Possible Japanese Assistance (1988-1992), DAR.

⁶Interview with the Coordinator, Bohol Area Integrated Development Project, Timog Avenue, Quezon City, May 1989.

⁷"Global Connections: The Japanese Presence in Asia; The Asian Presence in Japan," Time Magazine, June 1989.

⁸Interview with Mr. Watanabe, Director, OISCA-Philippines, June 21, 1989.

⁹Japan has been perceived to be starting to play political-diplomatic role, e.g., diplomatic moves vis-a-vis Cambodian problem, the May 1990 suggestion of Thailand former Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan to a visiting Japanese Defense Minister for joint exercise in the South China Sea, and some suggestions from Southeast Asia that Japan should play a role in UN peacekeeping in the post-Iraqi War and the Allied Powers.