

# Filipino Workers in Japan between 1980 and 2010: A Study of Political and Socioeconomic Mechanisms of International Migration

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## **Abstract**

The paper offers a methodological alternative to the push-pull approach in examining migration. It argues the need to recognize the historicity and structure of the interaction between people and society (or societies) in examining and analyzing spatial movements. While pre-existing structures constrain individuals' decisions to migrate, these structures can be modified by individual or collective decisions and actions, and are thus change or are open to change.

Using this perspective, the paper examines the shifts in the occupational structure of Filipino workers in Japan between 1980 and 2010. It probes the political and socioeconomic circumstances—the historicity—of their movement from the Philippines to Japan. The paper initially looks at the heavy inflow of Filipino “entertainers” to Japan in the 1980s, which were driven by the political and socioeconomic dynamics in both countries in the 1970s. These include the Philippine government’s labor export policy and promotion of the country’s tourist industry, and the increase of Japanese tourists in the Philippines and their sudden decline in the early 1980s. Lastly, the paper examines the decrease in the number of Filipino “entertainers” in Japan and explores factors behind the corresponding occupational shift of Filipinos in Japan to the manufacturing sector by the mid-2000s.

Keywords: Migration, Historico-Structural Approach, Overseas Filipino Workers in Japan

MIGRATION—I.E. THE SPATIAL MOVEMENT across borders—has taken place throughout the ages. Traders, soldiers, and missionaries have traveled great distances to expand their trading routes, imperial boundaries, and the number of religious converts (Appiah 1998). Historically, the physical movement of peoples influenced the material and intellectual culture of destination societies, as did the physical movements of goods, capital, and information. The importance of migration research cannot be devalued especially under intensifying globalization where more and more people live and work outside, and influence the character and dynamics of their birth countries, as well as their destination societies.

The objective of this paper is to offer and use a historico-structural approach as an alternative framework in analyzing international migration. The paper focuses on the political and socioeconomic mechanisms that determine the migration of Filipino workers to Japan between 1980 and 2010.

The push-pull approach—which is rooted in and heavily influenced by neoclassical economics and methodological individualism—is considered as the core of migration theory (International Organization for Migration 2008,103). It assumes that an individual's decision to migrate is based on a cost-benefit analysis that compares his place of origin and destination. Individuals decide to migrate only if by doing so yields a positive net return (Sjaastad 1962; Todaro 1969, 1976, 1989). George Borjas (1990) extends this notion and argues that individuals decide to migrate to a place where the expected discounted net returns are maximized over a referenced period. This implies that a high number of migrants are expected to come from low-income and high-poverty regions. However, various pieces of empirical evidence counter the expectation that low income is a key push factor for the spatial movement of workers (Massey 1988; Hatton and Williamson 1998). To illustrate this wealth of evidence, Massey (1988) introduced and developed the theory of poverty constraint to migration. The theory contends that migration costs—such as recruitment fees and processing fees for the issuance of passports and visas—constrain individuals from migrating, and that individuals need to acquire a certain minimum amount of money to migrate. In effect, the theory argues that migrants are expected not to come from low-

income and high-poverty areas; it also asserts that migration follows a paradoxical cycle or an inverted U shape (Massey 1988; Hatton and Williamson 1998), wherein migration increases as economic conditions at the origin improves, and decreases as the economic incentives to migrate decline because of better economic opportunities. Under the push-pull approach, the individual—as the unit of analysis—is seen as a utility maximizer (Greenwood 1975). It assumes that their decisions are based on a rational behavior deemed universal and therefore uninfluenced by their experiences and circumstances.

Despite the modifications found in the genealogy of theories within the push-pull approach to migration, the author finds serious limitations rooted in its individual-centered and broadly ahistorical nature. Such theories assume that individuals and their understanding of cost-benefit are mostly detached from political and socioeconomic dynamics. Under methodological individualism, societal dynamics are agglomerations of individual decisions. The understanding of social phenomena is limited to the information generated by synthesizing individual decisions to the level of the social phenomenon (Arnsperger and Varoufakis 2006). The framework has a commitment to explain macrophenomena as microfoundations at the individual level. This understanding is severely limiting. While the physical manifestation of the society is the collection of individuals, the society is driven not only by individual decisions but also by pre-existing institutions.

The paper presents an alternative framework in understanding migration—a historico-structural approach that shows how structural mechanisms underlie individual decisions driving migration flows.

### **Historico-Structural Approach**

Lydia Yu-Jose's (2007) "Why are Most Filipino Workers in Japan Entertainers" can be categorized under the structuralist framework. She pointed out that Filipinos' talent in music underlies the development of their occupation in Japan from musicians to "entertainers."

This approach is in line with Emile Durkheim's (1951 [1897], 38) argument that he made in "Suicide: A Study of Sociology." He wrote "the

individual is dominated by a moral reality greater than himself: namely, collective reality.” Under this framework, individuals are restrained by the existence of social rules and prohibitions as well as social obligations. He reasoned that any individual is always born into a society with certain sets of rules and obligations, which in turn influence how individuals—including their characters and ways of thinking—are formed.

While the paper utilizes this facet of Durkheimian structuralism, it appears limiting because political and socioeconomic environments do change. Furthermore, society is composed of a plurality of structures—each with its own emergent, but temporary characteristics; and their reproduction or transformation is actualized by appropriate actions of individuals or groups (Bhaskar 1989, 2011). Because political and socioeconomic structures change, the paper argues the need to recognize the historicity of the interaction between people and society (or the societies)—meaning that each moment in time does not correspond to an unchanging diagram but to a specific point in the flow of history (Archer 1995). What this means is that people’s decisions can be constrained by preexisting structures, which can, at the same time, be modified by individual or collective decisions and actions. These decisions, the paper recognizes, can have both intentional and unintentional outcomes.

In essence, the paper argues that political and socioeconomic structures continuously alter and that the agglomeration of individual decisions reflect these changes. The paper specifically relates the shifts in the occupational characteristics of Filipinos in Japan, and the decisions and actions made by individuals and groups that influence the shift, to the transformations in the political and socioeconomic structures in Japan and the Philippines. And because the paper is looking at the historicity of Filipino migration to Japan, it focuses on the period from 1980—when the number of Filipinos in the country increased rapidly—up to 2010, the year of the latest available census.

This study conceptualizes international migration as a movement between countries that have independent but sometimes intersecting

political and socioeconomic processes, which effect the movement between and within both the country of origin and the destination-country. On the one hand, this paper sees migration outflow as individual responses to the political and socioeconomic processes in the country of origin (Philippines). On the other hand, the inflow is the outcome of individual responses to the political and socioeconomic processes in the destination-country (Japan).

### **Research Contributions on OFWs in Japan**

Studies on Filipino migrants to America such as Barbara Posadas's (1999) indicate that the American occupation—including the inherent movement of Americans to the Philippines in the first half of the 20th century—fueled the opposite movement of people from the Philippines to America. Similarly, this paper hypothesizes that the movement of Japanese tourists to the Philippines have an effect on the migration of Filipinos to Japan. It further hypothesizes that the political and socioeconomic requirements of the destination country—in this case, Japan—largely determine the occupational type of incoming workers.

There have been a considerable number of previous studies on Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in Japan. However, many of these are premised on the notion that the OFWs are mostly entertainers (Suzuki 2000; Yu-Jose 2007; Nagano 2008,101–2; Parreñas 2010). In contrast, Satake and Da-anoy (2006, 46–56) show—using a questionnaire on 60 respondents—that Filipino women married to Japanese men tend to leave entertainment work in order to prioritize their families. Meanwhile, Kentaro Azuma (2010) examines the interrelationship between the reality and the image of OFWs in Japan. He points to the formation of a more realistic image of OFWs as wives and mothers. He interprets it as the change in the image of Filipino entertainers in Japan from that of a worker in the production process to a participant in the community. However, his paper does not elucidate the actual change in the occupation of OFWs in Japan in the production process that shaped the change in image.

Many other research on Filipinos in Japan focus on their being careworkers (Ogawa 2012; Ohno 2012; Lopez 2012). While the socioeconomic structure of an ageing Japan is an emergent mechanism influencing the occupational structure of Filipinos in Japan for the period being studied (between 1980 and 2010), care work never became a significant occupation of Filipinos in Japan during the period of study (to be discussed in a succeeding section).

Other studies report and analyze the manufacturing work of *nikkeijin*<sup>1</sup> (Tsuda 1999; Sharpe 2001). However, as of the paper's writing, no research and reports has focused on Filipino workers in the Japanese manufacturing sector, even though—to be mentioned in the succeeding discussions—they are mostly concentrated into the manufacturing sector.

Therefore, this paper contributes to existing research on Filipino workers in Japan by elaborating and analysing their presence in Japanese manufacturing. However, this remains peripheral to the paper's objective of providing an alternative methodology to the push-pull approach, an alternative that finds expression in the changes in the occupational structure of Filipino workers in Japan from entertainment to manufacturing.

The paper initially looks at the underlying political and socioeconomic determinants of Filipino outflows from the Philippines. It then examines the underlying circumstances and requirements of Filipino worker inflows into Japan. Finally, the paper explores the shift in the occupational structure of Filipino workers in Japan between 1980 and 2010.

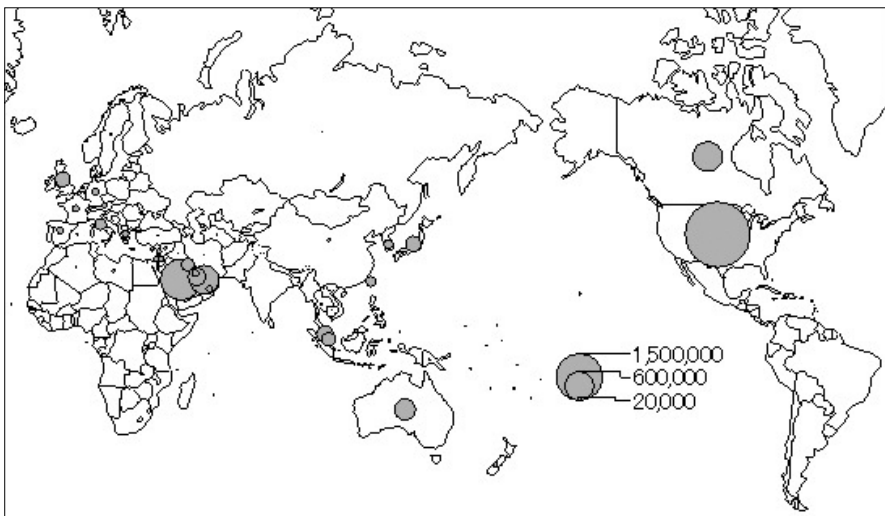
### **Situating the Filipino Outflow from the Philippines**

The Philippines is one of the largest labor exporting countries in the world. As of December 2009, there were more than 8.5 million overseas Filipinos, accounting for 10 percent of the Philippine population (Commission on Filipino Overseas 2009). Receiving US\$21 billion or 11 percent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2010, the Philippines was the fourth largest recipient of overseas worker remittances after India, China, and Mexico (World Bank 2011).

Overseas Filipinos are scattered around the world. Out of the 8.5 million overseas Filipinos, 42 percent are in the U.S., 28 percent in West Asia, 13 percent in South and East Asia, 8 percent in Europe, 5 percent in Oceania, 4 percent are sea-based, and 1 percent in Africa. By country, the top five destinations for Filipinos are the United States (2.9 million), Saudi Arabia (1.2 million), Canada (640,000), United Arab Emirates (610,000), and Australia (336,000).

An assumption in migration research is that migration is a transnational interaction that wanes with distance (such as Mouritzen and Wivel 2005). This is too simplistic as it mistakenly assumes that migration is simply a movement across a physical space; it does not realize that those spaces are embedded alongside socioeconomic, political, and cultural particularities. The case of Filipino international migration cannot be understood using this reductionist understanding. In contrast to the movement of peoples between neighboring countries such as in the case of Singapore-Johor-Riau or Mexico-United States, the movement of

FIGURE 1  
Overseas Filipinos (Stock as of December 2009)



Note: Figure created by author based on Commission on Filipino Overseas (2009).

Filipinos is global in character. Filipinos are found as far north as Northern Europe and as far south as New Zealand.

The global character of Filipino migration became possible because of the Philippine government's labor export policy in the 1970s. Prior to this, overseas work mostly depended on either private recruitment agencies or personal connections—e.g. family members, friends, and people from the same community.

### **Filipino Worker Outflows from the Philippines**

Right after independence in 1946, the Philippines experienced a current account deficit because of the massive inflow of American commodities. As a response, the government in the mid-1950s implemented the import-substitution-industrialization policy to reduce Philippine dependency on the American economy, and improve its current accounts situation.

However, the domestic market was limited. In the 1960s, the industrial sector started to decline and was not able to absorb surplus workforce. As a result, unemployment and underemployment became serious problems. And the import-substitution-industrialization policy did not accomplish the government's intention of reducing importation. The trade deficit was both serious and chronic. For instance, in 1946, the exports were at US\$64 million while imports were at US\$296 million; in 1972, exports grew to US\$1.1 billion, and imports to US\$1.2 billion. It is in this context that the 1970s saw a major shift in government policy from reducing foreign currency requirements to increasing foreign currency incomes. One of these policies concerned labor export, which, the government reckoned, would address unemployment and underemployment.

The Philippine government created various government agencies—such as the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency (POEA), the Philippine Overseas Labor Office (POLO), and the Commission on Filipino Overseas (CFO)—to facilitate the outflow of Filipinos from the Philippines as migrant workers or permanent migrants.



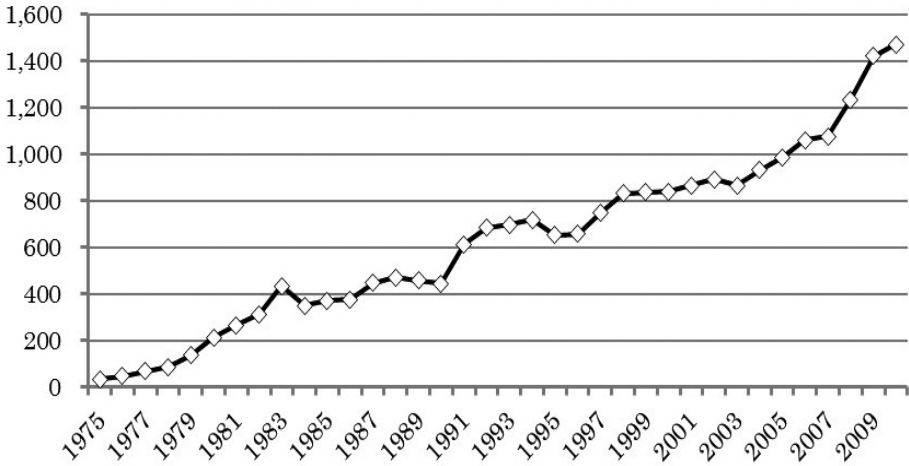
The government policy to promote overseas work started with the 1974 Overseas Employment Program (OEP). In order to administer the program, the government promulgated the 1975 Labor Code of the Philippines to create the Overseas Employment Development Board, National Seamen's Board, and Bureau of Employment Services. Through Presidential Order No. 797, these agencies were unified—establishing the POEA in 1982.

The POEA has three major responsibilities. These are 1) to develop the overseas labor market for Filipinos, 2) to supervise and approve participants to the OEP, and 3) to provide social security to Filipino workers overseas. It has various departments assigned with specific tasks, namely, 1) to make plans promoting overseas employment; 2) to assist Filipino workers in obtaining overseas employment; 3) to provide social assistance to Filipino workers overseas and to their families in the Philippines; 4) to issue government licenses to legitimate private recruitment agencies; and 5) to supervise licensed private recruitment agencies and to give a ruling on possible violations by recruitment agencies.

In short, the POEA's responsibility lies in the creation and actualization of the labor export program. Furthermore, the POEA creates guidelines—both formal and informal—to secure overseas work for Filipinos. Through government supervision of private recruitment agencies by the POEA, Filipinos who seek to work overseas are provided a form of protection. Consequently, Filipino confidence towards overseas work grew, and employment abroad increasingly became an option.

Meanwhile, the Philippine Overseas Labor Office (POLO) is the overseas office of the Department of Labor. The government agency provides various services to OFWs to secure their rights and ensure their well-being. As of 2014, POLO has 34 offices around the world. Its responsibilities include assistance for the legal protection of Filipinos overseas, as well as prison visits; provision of consultation desks on Philippine repatriation; legal assistance; counseling; and information-gathering on overseas labor markets. Other responsibilities involve the creation of a network of Philippine organizations and the dissemination of information.

FIGURE 2  
POEA deployment of Overseas Filipino Workers (in thousands)



Source: Iyotani and Kajita 1992 for the data between 1975 and 1983; Philippine Overseas and Employment Agency data for 1984 and onwards.

Lastly, the Commission on Filipino Overseas (CFO) is the government agency that orients Filipino migrants and dependents of foreign nationals prior to their departure. Responsible for the administrative matters concerning migration, as well as the welfare of Filipino residents overseas, the CFO promotes the networking of Filipinos overseas and foreign nationals of Filipino descent.

The establishment and frequent reorganization of government agencies involved in labor export indicate that the state had high expectations for overseas work to become a means to acquire foreign currency and dispose of excess labor in the country. Indeed, after the establishment of the POEA, the number of OFWs deployed under the government program increased from 36,000 in 1975 to 1.5 million in 2010—an increase of 42 times during the last 35 years (Figure 2).

As an outcome of the government's labor export policy, millions of Filipinos have been working all over the world as nurses and caregivers in

the United States; construction workers and engineers in West Asia; domestic helpers and babysitters in Hong Kong and Singapore; and sailors and crewmembers of oil tankers and cargo ships.

### **Situating the Inflows of Filipino Workers to Japan**

While the labor export policy can account for the outflow of Filipino workers from the Philippines, it cannot sufficiently explain the inflow of Filipino workers in each of the countries. This section examines the mechanisms that started the entry of Filipino workers into Japan.

As of 2010, Filipinos were the fourth largest migrant group in Japan following the Chinese, the Koreans, and the Brazilians. In the same year, there were 210,181 Filipino migrants, accounting for 10 percent of all the foreigners in Japan (Figure 3). If we look at the inflow of Filipinos to Japan, we can see that the number of Filipinos there increased substantially beginning in the 1980s (Figure 3). Most of these were women. In general, there is almost one female foreigner for every male foreigner in Japan, but there are three Filipino women for one Filipino man. And until 2005, most Filipinos came to Japan as Overseas Performing Artists (OPA)—singers and dancers in the entertainment industry. For instance, out of 38,772 Filipino workers deployed to Japan in 2005, 38,483 were OPAs. And much earlier, between 1993 and 2004, 99.5 percent of Filipino workers deployed to Japan under POEA were OPA, 95.9 percent of whom were women (POEA website). The data begs the question, “Why were there so many OPAs in Japan?”

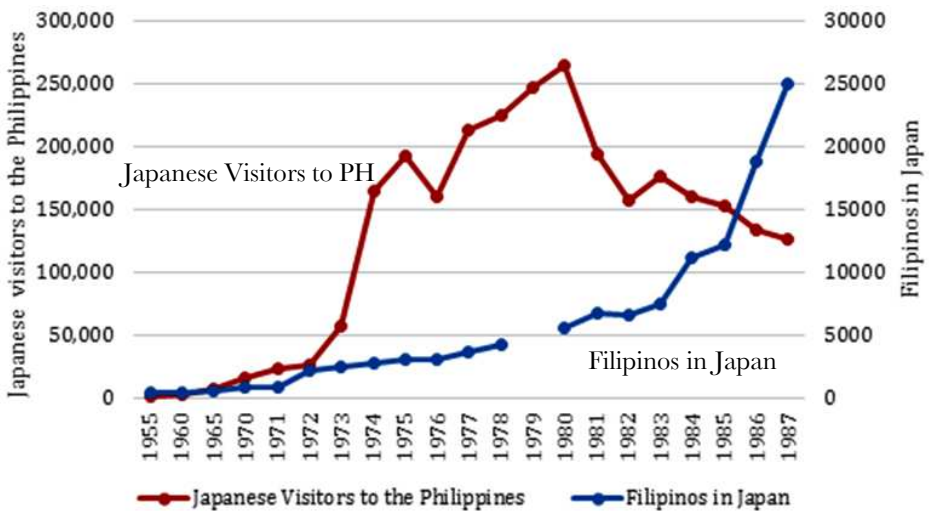
From the historical perspective, this section examines the mechanism that drove Filipino entertainment workers to go to Japan, the entertainment and sex industry in the Philippines, and its eventual shift to Japan.

Historically, the 1960s saw the escalation of the war in Vietnam, resulting in the rapid increase of American soldiers stationed in American military facilities in, among other countries, the Philippines. This led to an upsurge of entertainment establishments, particularly in the sex industry. However, as the social costs of the death and injuries of American soldiers as well as anti-War protests in the United States increased, the U.S.

government adopted the “Vietnamization policy”—the withdrawal of American soldiers from East Asia in the early 1970s. With the end of the Vietnam War in 1973, the number of American soldiers stationed in the military facilities in the Philippines decreased drastically. The red light industry, which caters to American soldiers, now shifted its focus to foreign tourists. And, with key physical infrastructure such as hotels and a major international airport, Metro Manila became the vital location of the Philippine sex industry. The number of foreigners increased from 51,000 in 1960 to 84,000 in 1965.

The shift in focus of the red light industry to foreign tourists was in line with the Philippine government’s policy to promote tourism in the country. As mentioned, socioeconomic problems of unemployment and trade deficits had pushed the government to adopt policies that sought to increase foreign

FIGURE 3  
Number of Japanese visitors to the Philippines and number  
of Registered Filipinos in Japan



Sources: Statistics Bureau of Japan (various editions) and National Statistical Coordination Board (Philippines, various editions).

currency income. Aside from labor export, the government also created the Ministry of Tourism in 1973, and ratified the Friendship, Commerce, and Navigation Treaty between the Philippines and Japan, among others. This tourism promotion policy was successful. For example, the number of foreign visitors sharply increased to 144,000 in 1970 or around 1.7 times the level in 1965. This number continued to increase such that in 1980, the number reached 1 million for the first time. Looking at the country of origin of the visitors, one sees the sharp increase of Japanese visitors both in number and proportion. They grew from 16,000 in 1970 to 24,000 in 1973 and to 265,000 in 1980. In 1970, Japanese visitors only accounted for 11 percent of the total. But in 1980, they comprised 26 percent of the overall number of tourists. Furthermore, between January and June 1981, visitors in the Philippines totaled 470,000. Of this, Japanese numbered 110,000 (Figure 4)—the most among all the countries—or 23 percent of the total visitors in the Philippines.

Most of the 110,000 Japanese visitors in the Philippines were male. The ratio of male and female Japanese tourists was 5:1, whereas all other countries had a 2:1 ratio. As shown in Figure 4, the number of Japanese tourists increased sharply in the 1970s. During this period, Japanese men in the Philippines purchased the “entertainment services” of Filipino women. This activity formed a demand for such services in Japan. Figure 3 also shows the number of Japanese visitors to the Philippines and the number of Filipinos in Japan from 1955 to the 1980s. Note that while the number of Japanese visitors to the Philippines sharply decreased starting in 1980, the number of Filipinos in Japan increased.

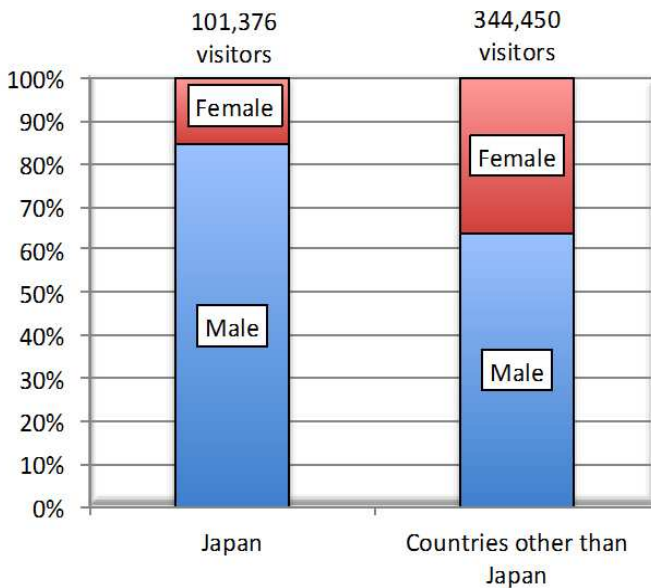
The steep decline of Japanese visitors to the Philippines is attributed to the growing concerns and views over the sex tours of Japanese men in the country. For instance, there was a concern in Japan that these actions would bring about international criticism and condemnation. On 22 October 1980, Takako Doi—a member of the Japanese Diet—brought up the issue at the session of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs. She voiced her concern that this issue might damage Japan’s diplomatic relationships based on mutual trust. During the October 29 session of the

Standing Committee, she questioned Manabu Kenmatsu—chairperson of Japan Association of Travel Agents (JATA)—on the association’s attitude towards the matter and demanded that improvements be made. As a form of initial response, Chairperson Kenmatsu expressed that actions such as the expulsion of an association member engaged in sex tours is not a straightforward matter—that difficulties arise as the association has to open an extraordinary general meeting in order to expel a member from the association, etc.<sup>2</sup>

However, the opposition to the sex tours was relentless. For instance, during the state visit of then Japan Prime Minister Zenko Suzuki to the Philippines, Philippine and Japanese feminist organizations held a demonstration in Metro Manila in protest of sex tourism. The

FIGURE 4

Visitors to the Philippines from Japan and from other countries between January and June 1981



Source: National Census and Statistics (1981).

demonstration was covered by local and international media organizations.<sup>3</sup> Under this prevailing condition, the Ministry of Transport of Japan cautioned the travel agency, *Nihon Ea Tsuristo Sha* (Japan Air Tourist Company), which was organizing sex tours. By 2 February 1981, the agency was removed from the roster of JATA (Asahi Shimbun 1981a). This illustrates the severity of the posture that both the Japanese government and Japan's travel industry adopted towards travel agencies that facilitated sex tours in the Philippines. For this reason, the Japanese travel industry refrained from sending its citizens to the Philippines; as a result, the number of Japanese visitors to the Philippines sharply dropped starting in 1981.

These and other factors stimulated the movement of Filipino women as retailers of “entertainment commodities” from the Philippines to Japan. Backed by the Philippine government's labor export policy and enabled by the activities of private recruitment agencies, Filipino women came to Japan to work in the entertainment industry beginning in the 1980s. By importing the “entertainment commodities” of Filipino women, the issue of sex tourism would no longer become a basis of international criticism of Japan. Furthermore, since the entertainment commodity provided by Filipino women can be purchased cheaply and sold expensively, the importation would increase the profits of Japanese businesses in the “entertainment industry” (Ito 1992, 319).

### **Occupational Diversification of Filipino Workers in Japan**

As discussed, many Filipino women initially came to Japan as “entertainers.” It is therefore not surprising that a considerable number of studies on OFWs in Japan assume that migrants are mostly “entertainers.”

The diverse occupational structure of “Japan

As early as 2005, statistical data from the Japanese government indicate that the top occupation for OFWs in Japan lay not in the “eating and drinking places; accommodations” sector which handles “entertainment

commodities,” but rather in the manufacturing industry. In 2005, 36 percent of all Filipinos in Japan were employed in the manufacturing sector; this would increase to 44 percent in 2010. Table 1 shows that in that year, the second most prominent occupation among Filipinos was in the “eating and drinking places, accommodations” sector (13 percent), followed by “industries that cannot be classified” (12 percent). Additionally, the proportion of Filipino workers in Japanese manufacturing (44 percent) is around three times more than the proportion of manufacturing workers in the entire country (16 percent) in 2010.

In terms of geographical distribution, the concentration of Filipino manufacturing workers in and around Aichi is particularly conspicuous. Aichi accounts for only 9 percent of manufacturing workers in Japan, but it accounts for more than 14 percent of all Filipino manufacturing employees. Furthermore, Filipinos in manufacturing are also concentrated in the prefectures around Aichi such as in Shizuoka, Gifu, and Mie, and in prefectures around Tokyo like Saitama, Chiba, and Ibaraki.

### Filipino Concentration in the Manufacturing Sector

After the 1985 Plaza Accord that led to a substantial appreciation of the Japanese yen, many Japanese companies transferred their manufacturing operations to countries where workers received lower wages. As international competition further intensified with the advancement of economic globalization in the 1990s and 2000s, more Japanese companies transferred their operations overseas to stay competitive (Lambino 2009). This brought about a general decline in the manufacturing industry in Japan. On the other hand, as small- and medium-scale enterprises that stayed in Japan shored up their competitiveness in part by reducing production costs, work conditions in the manufacturing sector deteriorated (*ibid.*). These small and medium-scale enterprises experienced labor shortage as Japanese workers avoided them because of poor working conditions. Under this circumstance, Filipinos and other foreigners filled up this labor gap.



OFWs in the Japanese manufacturing sector are concentrated in Kanto and Chubu (Figure 5) where small- and medium-scale companies agglomerate. This means that as international competition intensified under globalization, in which these companies faced pressure to reduce their costs, demand for low-wage labor in these regions rose as well. In other words, then, the shift in occupation of many OFWs in Japan to work in the manufacturing sector reflects the broader changes in the regional economic structure of the country.

### **Social and legal mechanisms on the inflow of low-skilled workers**

Filipinos as low-skilled workers—especially in the manufacturing sector—continued to increase, even if the fundamental guidelines of the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act (Immigration Act) does not generally recognize the inflow of such workers. At any rate, because of this legal restriction, it is therefore important to explicate several mechanisms that allowed Filipinos to work as low-skilled workers

TABLE 1: Filipino workers in Japan (2010)

|  | <b>Total Employees in Japan and Industry Share</b> | <b>Total Filipino Employees in Japan</b> |
|--|--|--|
| Total Workers                                    | 58,754,208   | 71,041                                   |
| Total Percentage                                 | 100%   | 100%                                     |
| Manufacturing sector                             | 16%  | 44%                                      |
| Eating and drinking places, accomodations sector | 6%   | 13%                                      |
| Wholesale and Retail sector                      | 17%  | 7%                                       |
| Other sectors                                    | 55%  | 24%                                      |
| Sectors that cannot be classified                | 6%   | 12%                                      |

Source: Statistics Bureau of Japan. “2010 Population and Housing Census.”

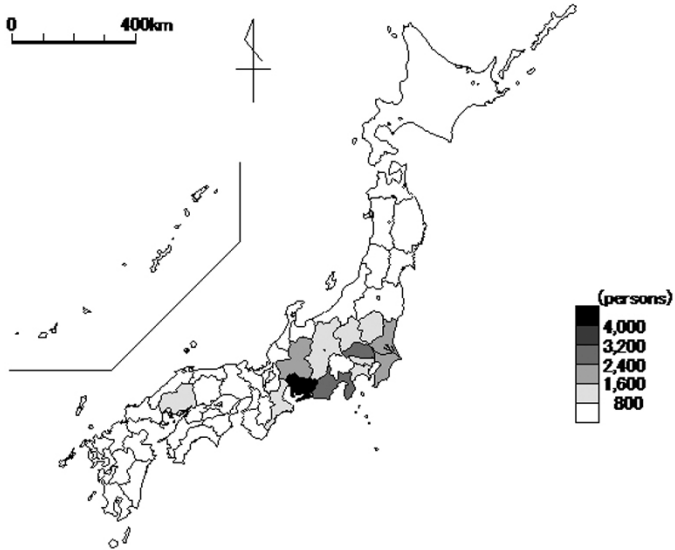
TABLE 2: Filipino Workers and Total Workers in the Manufacturing Sector in Japan (2010)

| Prefecture | Filipino Workers | Total Workers | Prefecture | Filipino Workers | Total Workers |
|------------|------------------|---------------|------------|------------------|---------------|
| Hokkaido   | 76               | 204,265       | Shiga      | 470              | 178,658       |
| Aomori     | 63               | 65,613        | Kyoto      | 230              | 194,038       |
| Iwate      | 195              | 97,743        | Osaka      | 532              | 606,922       |
| Miyagi     | 161              | 139,236       | Hyogo      | 553              | 451,031       |
| Akita      | 112              | 75,201        | Nara       | 66               | 100,191       |
| Yamagata   | 165              | 115,586       | Wakayama   | 54               | 63,357        |
| Fukushima  | 363              | 187,920       | Tottori    | 93               | 40,509        |
| Ibaraki    | 1,646            | 292,486       | Shimane    | 118              | 47,228        |
| Tochigi    | 830              | 229,258       | Okayama    | 204              | 168,541       |
| Gunma      | 1,171            | 225,747       | Hiroshima  | 1,360            | 236,340       |
| Saitama    | 2,509            | 557,368       | Yamaguchi  | 191              | 113,231       |
| Chiba      | 1,721            | 340,961       | Tokushima  | 95               | 52,888        |
| Tokyo      | 1,553            | 587,973       | Kagawa     | 473              | 77,700        |
| Kanagawa   | 1,466            | 601,622       | Ehime      | 254              | 99,099        |
| Niigata    | 388              | 211,403       | Kochi      | 43               | 28,989        |
| Toyama     | 549              | 131,878       | Fukuoka    | 291              | 263,231       |
| Ishikawa   | 121              | 110,016       | Saga       | 67               | 61,803        |
| Fukui      | 244              | 87,108        | Nagasaki   | 106              | 72,675        |
| Yamanashi  | 477              | 84,665        | Kumamoto   | 173              | 105,570       |
| Nagano     | 855              | 226,458       | Oita       | 216              | 79,979        |
| Gifu       | 2,030            | 246,810       | Miyazaki   | 78               | 64,926        |
| Shizuoka   | 3,059            | 475,963       | Kagoshima  | 242              | 82,267        |
| Aichi      | 4,486            | 900,869       | Okinawa    | 22               | 27,806        |
| Mic        | 1,391            | 212,856       |            |                  |               |

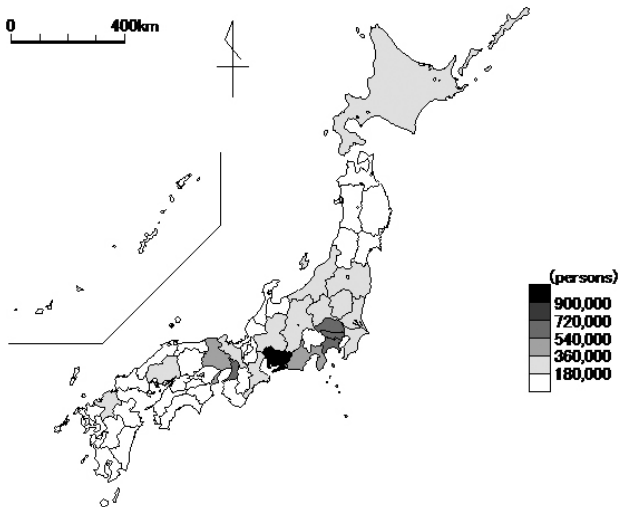
in the Japanese manufacturing sector, if not other industries. This section identifies two causes.

The first pertains to the 1990 revision of the Immigration Act. After the Plaza Accord, the 1986 Mackawa report assessed that a monetary easing policy be adopted to promote the shift of dependence from foreign demand

**FIGURE 5**  
Filipino Workers in the Manufacturing Sector in Japan (2010)



**FIGURE 6**  
Total Workers in the Manufacturing Sector in Japan (2010)



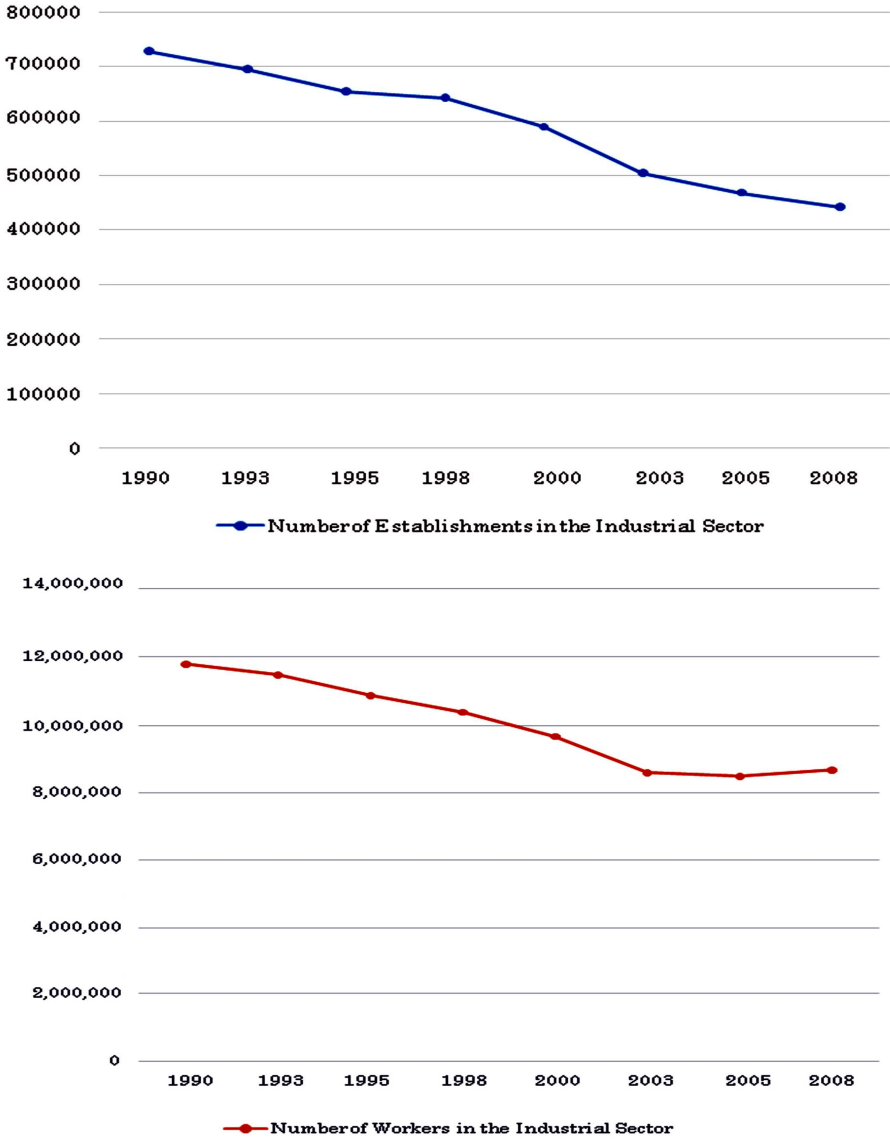
Note: Figures created by author based on Statistics Bureau of Japan (2010).

to domestic demand. Unexpectedly, monetary easing caused two kinds of economic bubble: the asset bubble and the labor bubble. The labor bubble prompted the government to adopt deregulation measures—such as the foreign trainee program and the entry and employment of *nikkeijin*—in the labor market by revising the Immigration Act in 1990 (Iguchi 2001, 23, 43). However, even after the labor bubble burst, the inflow of foreign trainees and *nikkeijin* workers continued to rise. The demand for labor in the general labor market declined, but that in specific sectors like small-medium scale enterprises increased. In other words, the rise in the number of foreign trainees and *nikkeijin* workers corresponded with the labor shortage in small- and medium-scale enterprises. For them to survive, foreign trainees and *nikkeijin* workers became indispensable. And the revision of the Immigration Act became their gateway to come to Japan and work as low-skilled workers in the manufacturing sector, if not other industries.

The second reason for Filipino presence in Japan involves the acquisition of the right of permanent residence. Filipinos who married Japanese nationals and descendants of Japanese nationals who migrated overseas in the past are given the residence status of a “spouse or child of Japanese national” or a “long-term resident.” The residence status of “spouse or child of Japanese National” refers to the actual and the adopted children of Japanese nationals, as well as their spouses. Many Filipino *nikkeijin* have the residence status of “long-term resident.” In 1992, they numbered 2,617 and increased to 37,870 in 2010 (Immigration Bureau of Japan, various editions). Figure 8 also shows that Filipinos with the resident status of “spouse or child of Japanese national” rose sharply from 2,967 in 1984 to 41,255 in 2010. Meanwhile, Filipinos with “permanent resident” status increased from 192 in 1984 to 92,754 in 2010. In contrast, the number of Filipinos who hold “entertainer visas” increased until the mid-2000s from 3,835 in 1984 to 50,691 in 2004; and sharply decreased in the latter half of 2000 to 6,319 in 2010.

In this sense, the legal residency status of some Filipinos in Japan shifted from “entertainer” to “long-term resident,” “spouse or child of

FIGURE 7  
Declining manufacturing sector in Japan



Source: Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (Japan) (2011).

Japanese national” or “permanent resident.” This means that their legal status became a more permanent one. And acquiring permanent residence, many had the tendency to leave entertainment work.

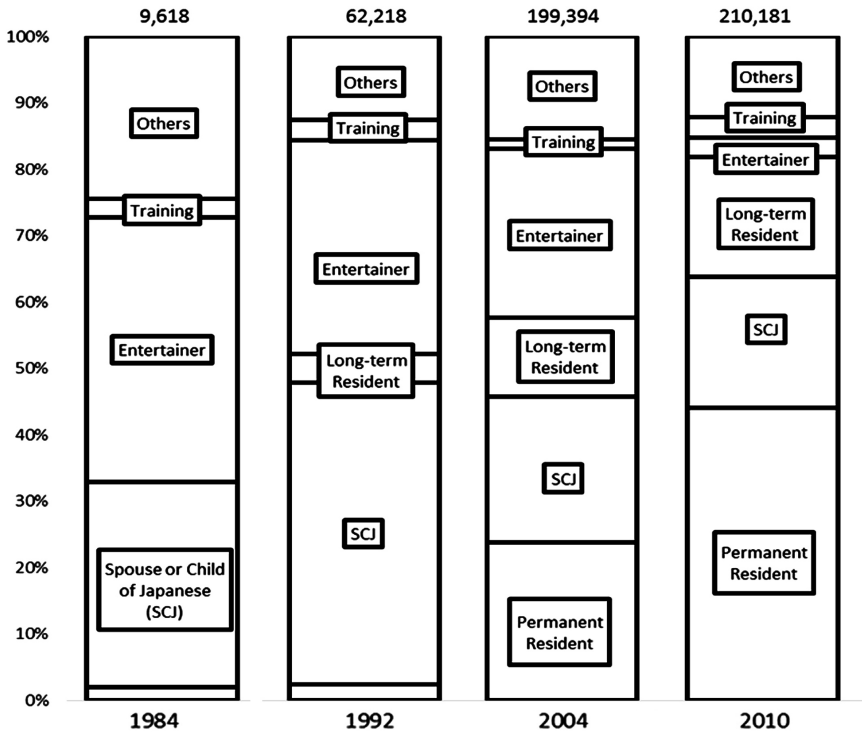
Another factor in the shift away from entertainment industry lies increased rigor of the screening for the residency status of “entertainer,” which led to a sharp decrease in the number of OPA deployed under POEA from 39,000 in 2005 to 7,000 in 2006. The stringency of the screening process had to do with release of Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP) by the U.S. State Department in 2001, in which Japan was classified as a major transit point for human smuggling and as a destination country of women from Thailand, the Philippines, and the Newly Independent States who are trafficked for sexual exploitation. Furthermore, in the 2002 report, Japan is the only developed country among 52 countries classified under tier two.<sup>5</sup> These circumstances contributed to the Japanese government’s signing of the “Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons” in December 2002, which was eventually approved by the Japanese Diet in June 2005. Similarly, a measure against human trafficking—an ordinance of the Ministry of Justice—was revised to add more rigor to screening process for the residency status of “entertainer.” In 2010, 6,319 (3 percent) out of the total 210,181 Filipinos in Japan have a legal status of “entertainers” (Immigration Control 2011).

### **Japan’s Ageing Society and Filipino Care Workers**

Right after the stricter screening of “entertainers” was implemented in 2006, the Philippines and Japan entered a new era in their socioeconomic relationship vis-a-vis migration. In 2006, the governments of both countries signed the Japan-Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement (JPEPA), Filipino nurses and caregivers would enter Japan because of changing demographics in the country. In the 1990s, there already were widespread concerns over the low birthrate and the impact of the ageing population: that it would reduce social vitality and increase the social costs of caring for the elderly.<sup>6</sup>

The Japanese government acknowledged the need to adopt a policy to help counter population decrease and the other effects of an ageing population. It recognized that improvements in childbirth and childcare—allowing Japanese women to have children while continuing to work—would lead to an increase in birthrate and productivity. It was also aware that enhancing health care would minimize the social costs of an ageing society. However, the childcare and healthcare sectors were suffering from a labor shortage because of poor working conditions. For this reason, many in Japan turned to employing foreign workers in childcare and healthcare. Indeed, long-term Filipino residents in Japan are seen as alternative care workers (Lopez 2012). And

FIGURE 8  
Residency status of Filipinos in Japan



Source: Immigration Bureau of Japan (various editions).

the perception and expectation led many researchers and scholars (Asato 2012; Lopez 2012; Ohno 2012) to focus on Filipinos in healthcare.

However, under the period of study (1980–2010), there is no evidence of a significant influence of the ageing population on the occupational structure of Filipino workers in Japan. According to the 2010 Population and Housing Census in Japan, only 3.7 percent (2,593 out of 71,041) of the Filipinos in the country work in the “Medical, Health care and Welfare” sector as against 10.4 percent (6,103,345 out of 58,754,208) of the total working population in Japan. Therefore, the representation of Filipinos as care workers has a weak basis on macroempirical data at least until 2010. Thus, the most we can say is that as of 2010, the ageing population of Japan is only an emergent structural mechanism that may influence the occupational structure of Filipino workers in the country in the future.

### **Concluding remarks**

To understand the movement of peoples across national borders under globalization, this paper offered an alternative approach—i.e. historico-structural approach—in analyzing the international mobility of labor power. In particular, it explored the changing political and socioeconomic dynamics in both the Philippines and Japan, factors that helped determine the outflow of Filipinos from the Philippines, and their inflow into Japan between 1980 and 2010. Also, the paper examined the shift in the occupations of OFWs in the country. And the analyses yielded the following points and contributions to existing research:

In contrast to a static or an unchanging understanding of occupational structure, the paper historicizes the structure of Filipino worker migration to Japan and shows the dynamism of occupational structure in the country.

At the onset in the early 1980s, most OFWs in Japan began working in the entertainment industry. The paper elucidated a historico-structural approach to explain this phenomenon, which emerged from several



interlocking factors: the socioeconomic circumstances in the Philippines (promotion of tourism and labor export policy); the geopolitical situation in the region (e.g. Vietnamization and the end of Vietnam War); and the increase of Japanese tourists in the Philippines in the 1970s, an inflow that was choked by Japan's diplomatic concerns over its international affairs.

The paper has also shown that Filipino migration to Japan and elsewhere was greatly affected by the policies of the Philippine government, which themselves grew out of socioeconomic political dynamics within the country. Massive chronic trade deficits and serious problems of unemployment and underemployment—because of the failure of the import-substitution-industrialization policies in the 1950s and 1960s—compelled the government to adopt a labor export policy and promote tourism.

The American defeat in the Vietnam War also laid the groundwork for the inflow of Japanese tourists to the Philippines in the 1970s, who purchased “entertainment commodities” and engaged in sex tours. This was an activity that would influence the creation of a niche and market for Filipino women as entertainers in Japan. In 1980, however, the Japanese government was criticized by Filipino and Japanese activists for engaging in sex trafficking. The Japanese government and its travel industry thus began to take a strict posture against sex tours, which then drastically reduced the flow of Japanese tourists to the Philippines.

This in turn proved another factor that induced the migration of Filipino women to Japan as entertainers. In this sense, then, Filipino migration to Japan was also an outcome of changing geopolitical circumstances as well as diplomatic objectives and requirements.

As mentioned, the Filipino inflow of mostly entertainment workers to Japan in the 1980s was an unintentional outcome of the sudden increase of Japanese tourists in the Philippines in the 1970s and their sudden decrease in the 1980s. In other words, the inflow of Japan OFWs is a reflexive response to and a result of the inflow of people from Japan to the Philippines.

The paper illustrated that OFWs came to Japan to supply labor requirements in certain occupational sectors there. This was evident from the OFWs' occupational structure and from the change in their jobs when the Japanese economy restructured. This occupational shift of OFWs in Japan is largely a result of changes in the socioeconomic context in the country, particularly its demand for labor. The Plaza Agreement and the adoption of a monetary easing policy, and the consequent and subsequent intensifications of economic globalization, altered Japan's economic landscape and precipitated the inflow of low-skilled Filipino workers especially in the manufacturing industry.

However, it must be said that labor requirements in foreign states per se do not automatically draw migrant workers from labor-exporting countries. For instance, although Europe has been a major destination for migrant workers, OFWs there are relatively few. This is partially because the type of work that a migrant can provide helps determine his/her country of destination. Thus, in the case of OFWs in Japan, certain factors—especially the entry of Japanese tourists to the Philippines—were essential to Japan's becoming a destination for Filipino migrant workers.

Many studies on OFWs in Japan are based on the prevailing notion that they are mostly entertainers. In contrast, the paper has shown that the preconception of Filipinos being “entertainers” no longer has a factual basis. Furthermore, while there is much research on Filipinos as care workers in Japan, the paper has shown that as of 2010, only few Filipinos (3.7 percent) work in this sector. Instead of being entertainers or caregivers, majority of them have worked in the manufacturing sector since 2005.

All in all, the paper has shown that Filipino worker migration to Japan is an outcome of interweaving and dynamic socioeconomic political circumstances and requirements within and outside the Philippines and Japan, suggesting that migration research requires an interdisciplinary approach and that migration mechanisms are co-evolving with the dynamics of other structures.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> *Nikkeijin* is a term that refers to Japanese emigrants to other countries and their descendants.
- <sup>2</sup> The information was derived from the minutes of the meeting held on October 22 and 29 of 1980 of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Japanese parliament.
- <sup>3</sup> Refer to Mainichi Shimbun (1981) and Asahi Shimbun (1981b).
- <sup>4</sup> The information was retrieved from the POEA website. Using the data of the Philippine government, the paper shows the drastic decrease of inflow of Filipinos to Japan from 2005 to 2006.
- <sup>5</sup> Countries under tier two are those “making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance.”
- <sup>6</sup> The total fertility rate in Japan in 1995 is 1.42, which at the time became the lowest ever. As a result, “low fertility” became a social concern in Japan beginning in the 1990s. At the Ninth Meeting of Administrative Reform Panel in 1997, Committee Member Akito Arima pointed out that Japan is burdened with intensifying international competition because of the advance of globalization and diminished social vitality due to an aging society that is coupled with low birthrate. Furthermore, the total fertility rate in Japan further decreased to 1.26, which became the lowest rate ever.

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