

Filipino Workers in Japan: Vulnerability and Survival¹

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THIS PAPER HAS THREE OBJECTIVES:

- (a) Firstly, to sketch a picture of the average Filipino visitor to Japan based on the latest available Japanese immigration data;
- (b) Secondly, to examine the realities suggested by the statistical data, and to determine the extent to which these are perceived and experienced by Filipinos living and working in Japan; and
- (c) Thirdly, to understand how Filipino migrant workers attempt to protect themselves against the various forms of vulnerability that characterize their general situation in Japan.

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This paper draws heavily from the statistical information provided by the Japan Immigration Association which annually publishes "Statistics on Foreigners and Japanese Arriving and Leaving Japan," as well as from supplementary information on Filipinos in Japan released by the Philippine Embassy in Tokyo, as cited in a recent unpublished paper of Dr. Elena L. Samonte, entitled "Philippine-Japan Relations: Can We Go Beyond Economic Parameters?," found in the book, *Hokuto Tonan Asia no Sogo Izon Kankei ni Kansuru Kenkyu*, (Tokyo: Zaidan Honin Sangyo Kenyujo, Hokuto Tonan Asia Kenkyukai, 1991). The qualitative material used in this paper, on the other hand, is based on intensive interviews conducted by the author in Japan in November-December 1990.

The Statistical Picture

In 1989, 2,985,764 foreign visitors came to Japan -- more than in any previous year. Excluding the 529,988 re-entrants (temporary and permanent foreign residents), the number of new foreign visitors who came to Japan in 1989 was placed at 2,455,766.²

Seventy-three per cent (73%) of these new entrants came from Asian countries. South Korea alone accounted for 524,072 or 21.3%, and Taiwan 449,608 or 18.3%. The Philippines accounted for 69,567 or only 2.8% of the total.

More than half of all the new visitors (1,330,649 or 54.2%) in 1989 came on tourist visas, followed by those who held short-term business visas (730,939 or 24.5%).

Interestingly, Asia accounted for 61.5% of all tourists who visited Japan in 1989. Taiwanese tourists were the largest group at 381,916 or 28.7% of the total, while South Korean tourists totalled 278,105 or 21%. Filipinos who came on tourist visas in 1989 numbered only 9,971, or less than 1% of the total number of tourists for that year.

Type of Visa Held

If not as tourists, in what capacity do most Filipinos come to Japan then? The figures convey a disturbing answer. Nearly one-half (32,636 or 47%) of all the new visitors from the Philippines in 1989 came in as "entertainers." This visa category refers to persons involved in "drama, vaudeville, musical performance, sports, and other performing activities."³ A very general description indeed; one which gives no hint of the negative connotations typically associated with this word in Japan.



CATALOGUE BARGAINS. Promoters file the pictures and personal data of their recruits into a catalogue to be shown to Japanese club and bar managers who use it to shop for their "entertainers." Among the information given is

Professor Komai of Tsukuba University notes:

"The visa for these performances is exploited as a means of entrance into Japan by women who want to engage in the sex-related business, and by the brokers who make women work in this business. Most of the entrants with an entertainer visa, for example, singers and dancers, have acted as bar hostesses practically, mostly serving guests and talking to them at their seats, except for a short show time."⁴

It is remarkable that while Filipinos constitute a very small minority of those who annually visit Japan, two visa categories are dominated by them: that of "entertainer

2. Unless otherwise indicated, all statistical data used in this report were taken from "Statistics on Foreigners and Japanese Arriving and Leaving Japan in 1989," published by the Japan Immigration Association.

3. Quoted in Komai, 1990.

4. Komai Hiroshi, *Foreign Women in the Sex-Related Business in Japan*, (typescript) 1990.

and that of "spouse/children of Japanese national."

A total of 60,546 foreigners entered Japan in 1989 as entertainers. Of these, 32,636 or 54% were Filipinos. The latter clearly dominate the field, a dubious distinction. A distant second is the United States, which sent 8,384 entertainers to Japan in 1989, a measly 13.8% of the total, and only 1.7% of the total number of Americans who came to Japan that year (in contrast to the Philippines' 27%).

In the past, South Korea was reputed to be



girl's economic background: whether she has a sick father, or brothers and sisters unable to attend school. The more desperate a girl, the greater the stronghold of her manager.

a large supplier of entertainers to Japan. In 1984, 7,091 Koreans entered Japan with entertainer's visas. But the following year, 1985, the number dramatically dropped to 754. Prof. Komai ascribes this to the Korean government's imposition of strict controls on the departure of *kisaeng* (Korean *geisha*) girls, following the publicized suicides of a number of Korean hostesses in Japan in 1983. It may be said, by way of comparison, that Filipino women too have had their share of unexplained deaths in Japan in the last few years. But the deployment of Filipino women as entertainers has continued unabated.

Meanwhile, imported brides are also becoming very popular in Japan. Spouses and children of Japanese nationals are

lumped under one visa category -- "spouse/children of Japanese." In 1989, a total of 7,847 such visas were issued by Japanese immigration authorities. Thirty-one per cent (2,430) of these went to Filipinos, exceeding the figure for all other nationals. And the number continues to increase rapidly.

Next to the entertainer and tourist visas, the other categories used by Filipinos entering Japan in 1989 are:

- the short-term "business" visa
= 9,649 or 13.8 %;
- "visiting relatives" visa
= 4,817 or 6.9 %;
- "trainees" visa
= 3,974 or 5.7 %;
- "spouse/children of Japanese"
visa = 2,430 or 3.5 %;
- "Japanese language students"
visa = 808 or 1.1 %;
- "College students" visa
= 174 or 0.25 %

However, regardless of the type of visa carried, it is commonly assumed that all Filipinos who come to Japan are potential workers, with varying degrees of vulnerability depending on the extent to which they deviate from the terms of their respective visas.

One wishes there was a way of knowing how many of those who have come on tourist and other visas are actually skilled workers and professional employees, who, otherwise, would have been barred from entering by the Japanese government's existing restrictions against foreign workers. For it is truly unfortunate that Filipino labor in Japan is mainly identified with entertainment and sex-related businesses. While it is true that the category "entertainer" is by no means synonymous with "prostitute," the distinction is blurred in the minds of the average Japanese. The massive deployment of Filipino entertainers to Japan is mainly responsible for the distorted image of the Filipino people's capabilities.

Age and Gender

Sixty-five per cent of all Filipinos who entered Japan in 1989 were between 15 and



CRYING FOR HER LOST SELF. *One of two Filipina entertainers who became deranged due to their traumatic experience in Japan finds love and solace in the arms of her aunt upon her return to the country. She is only twenty-one years old, has worked in Japan since she was sixteen, and was the sole bread winner of her family. The other Filipina escaped from her employer who beat her up and withheld her salary, only to end up gang raped by three Japanese men who befriended her.*

29 years old. This number is nearly three times higher than the 24 % figure for all nationalities in the 15-29 age bracket.

The picture and the message become starker when we bring in the gender factor. At least two items of information are interesting in this regard. First is that Filipino women entering Japan in 1989 outnumbered Filipino men by 3 to 1. Worse, in the age group 20-24 years, Filipino women outnumbered the men by more than 10 to 1.

Filipino women comprised 75.7 % of all Filipinos who arrived in Japan in 1989. This contrasts sharply with the gender distribution for all nationalities: 39.2% females and 60.8 % males.

We are told that the bias in favor of Filipino women is gradually vanishing as a growing number of Filipino males take up jobs in factories and construction sites. If the trend continues, the coming years will perhaps also bring in older and, hopefully, less vulnerable Filipinos.

Illegally Staying and Deportable Filipinos

While in Japan, one may decide to ignore the restrictions imposed by one's visa, and proceed to work for a living without a proper work permit. Or, regardless of one's visa category, one may simply opt to overstay. In either case, one becomes an *illegal alien* subject to deportation.

It is extremely difficult to estimate the number of illegal aliens currently staying in Japan. One might however draw an educated guess from the data furnished by immigration authorities or disclosures and deportations of illegally staying foreigners.

Information from Japan's Ministry of Justice shows that in 1989, a total of 4,817 illegally staying foreign women were apprehended and ordered deported. Bar hostesses accounted for 67% of the total.⁵

An equally startling datum is that one out of every two women deported from Japan in 1989 was a Filipina, in almost all instances an overstaying or undocumented bar hostess.

By definition, illegal aliens are difficult to monitor; their real number is unknown. Therefore, it comes as a surprise that the Philippine embassy in Tokyo has a stock estimate of all Filipinos in Japan, which includes "illegals," as of the first quarter of 1990.

Domestic Helpers:	3,120 = 2.2%
Trainees:	5,174 = 3.64%

5. Cited in Komai, 1990.

Teachers/Engineers/Skilled Workers:	1,783 = 1.25 %
Entertainers:	61,432 = 43.28 %
Illegals:	70,428 = 49.61 %
TOTAL:	141,937 ⁶

These figures show that one out of two Filipinos staying in Japan at present is an illegal alien. How many of these are in the entertainment business and how many are in factory settings and construction sites is anybody's guess. But we are inclined to believe that the percentage of Filipino illegals (mainly due to overstaying) in Japan is probably even higher. We might also ask under what category Filipino women married to Japanese nationals are classified. The same is true for Filipinos enrolled in universities and language schools.

Aspects of the Filipino Migrant's Vulnerability

One very distinct impression emerges from the preceding discussion: *every other Filipino in Japan today is a young woman, between 15 and 24 years of age, has violated the terms of her visa (either by working without permit or by overstaying), is therefore deportable, and makes a living as an entertainer.*

"The desperation that extreme economic poverty induces in migrants from an impoverished country implies a readiness to do or accept almost anything just to earn a living."

This is the picture of the average Filipino in Japan today that one can draw from existing statistical information. It is a disturbing picture, not simply because of the negative image

that it projects of Filipinos in general, but more importantly because it suggests a situation and a way of life in a foreign country characterized by extreme vulnerability. What do we mean?

1. That Filipinos who come to Japan are mostly young, female, and have taken up jobs in an industry which is commonly presumed to be sex-related, suggests not the adventurousness or audacity of young people, but rather the desperation that extreme economic poverty induces in migrants from an impoverished country. This desperation implies a readiness to do or accept almost anything just to earn a living.

2. That they are young women entertainers from an impoverished country, coming in to work mainly in small bars, brings to mind not the artistic performances of creative artists organized by legitimate cultural impresarios, but rather the thinly disguised performances associated with an industry typically dominated by criminal syndicates.



BACKSTAGE, THEATER OF THE SUPER EXPLOITED. Long on working hours, short on pay, and much forced sex in between.

⁶Cited in Elena L. Samonte, "Philippine-Japan Relations: Can We Go Beyond Economic Parameters?," 1990.

3. That they are prone to violate their visas or to overstay suggests a situation that invites easy manipulation by their employers or by those responsible for bringing them to and placing them in Japan.

"Dazzled by stories of fat earnings in Japan by returning Filipina entertainers, many families are, in fact led to expect a quick deliverance from their economic woes by the anticipated earnings of their daughters, sisters, wives, or mothers."

4. That they are young suggests relative inexperience and lack of sophistication in dealing with cultures other than their own.

5. That they have come to Japan, a nation (unlike America, which is a familiar destination for most migrant Filipinos) vastly different in language and culture from their own, a homogeneous society in which large communities of long-time Filipino residents are not known to exist, suggests a life of relative isolation and loneliness that is not easy to overcome.

To what extent are these presumed aspects of the Filipino migrant's objective situation in Japan perceived and experienced

by the migrants themselves? How do these realities impinge upon their everyday life in Japan?

Vulnerability and Defense

In the preceding discussion, we suggested that it might be possible to account for the vulnerability of the Filipino migrant worker in Japan in terms of five key elements, namely:

- a) Desperate economic need;
- b) Employment in an industry in which criminal syndicates are known to have a dominant presence;
- c) Illegal status in Japan;
- d) Inexperience; and
- e) Huge cultural gap between one's own and the host culture.

Economic Desperation

Desperate economic need is exacerbated by the fact that all too often, a Filipino migrant worker will have borrowed and spent enormous sums of money in order to land a job abroad. Alternatively, some money may have been advanced to the girl's family by a promoter, to be paid from future earnings. Dazzled by stories of fat earnings in Japan by returning Filipina entertainers, many families are, in fact, led to expect a quick deliverance from their economic woes by the anticipated earnings of their daughters, sisters, wives, or



FILIPINO DIASPORA. There are close to a million Filipino contract workers abroad, one of the largest overseas workforces in the world, each caught in a frantic search of the elusive promised land.

mothers. Such pressure from the family back home can be so compelling as to produce in the Filipino worker the kind of docility and submissiveness that Japanese employers have come to expect from migrant workers.

In December 1990, a group of twenty-three Filipino workers employed in a small company in the Ibaraki Prefecture told me of the disparity in pay between them and their Japanese counterparts. For the same type of work, the difference in pay was at least \$1,000 per day, they said. Yet, they found it inconceivable to bring up this point to their boss, for fear of dismissal. They try to make up for the relatively low hourly rates by working longer hours than the Japanese workers, and by living frugally.

Another group of seven Filipino women working in a so-called snack bar also in the Ibaraki area told me that they were paid \$500 per month plus free lodging. They told me that they were aware that this was small compared to what they thought others normally received. Yet they were prepared to finish their six-month contract with their *mama-san* (bar madame) in order to make sure they would send out money regularly to their families back home.

I also met two Filipinas who have long released themselves from their contracts, and are now overstaying as free-lance entertainers. In their present status, their commitment to a "snack bar" or club operator is only as good as their satisfaction with their jobs. These two women told me that that they were no longer fully dependent on their earnings as bar hostesses. One of them bought and sold jewelry on the side; the other collected car stereos from junkyards and shipped these to Manila. They live with their Filipino boyfriends who are employed in a garment-making factory.

What these cases suggest is that economic need is an important source of vulnerability especially during the first few months, when a debt is probably being paid, and other job prospects are closed. At that time, most Filipinos are able to overcome this vulnerability so that it is no longer a significant factor in deciding whether to remain or to leave a current job, although it may still spell the difference between going home and staying in Japan.



TIGER BY THE TAIL. "In an industry that is widely known to be connected with the criminal underworld, control over the workers is far more coercive and fearsome."

An Industry Known to be the Preserve of Criminal Syndicates

Were the average Filipino in Japan a domestic helper or a nurse or even a construction worker recruited by a registered company, the perils of leaving an abusive employer would probably be not as great as those faced by Filipina entertainers in Japan. In an industry that is widely known to be connected with the criminal underworld, control over the workers is far more coercive and fearsome.

In the custody of these syndicates, many Filipinas are virtually treated, according to many published accounts, as prisoners from the moment they land in Japan. Their movements are restricted. And they are often shuffled from bar to bar like private property. Release from such bondage, where it is possible, often entails payment of a huge amount of money representing expenses supposedly incurred by the promoter in bringing them to Japan.

I have been told that Japanese criminal syndicates have also recently become active in deploying Filipino workers for construction jobs. If this is true, I would still suppose that the degree of control over these workers would not be as rigid as that applied to Filipino women in the entertainment industry. There is greater motivation for the criminal syndicates to exercise comprehensive control over personnel in the entertainment business precisely because this busi-

ness is so intimately connected with prostitution, which remains illegal in Japan.

Filipino women know this only too well. The margins of security for those employed in the entertainment industry are very limited. One has to buy one's freedom, and often this is possible only by living in with, or marrying, a Japanese client. In this way, one may choose to leave this type of work altogether, or, in most instances, one may go solo as an entertainer, choosing work according to one's preferences, instead of being assigned to a bar by a Yakuza promoter.

Illegal Alien Status

The estimates vary; some go up to as high as 70%, but there is general agreement that Filipinos who may be classified as illegal aliens constitute at least half of all Filipinos currently residing in Japan.

The most common are the so-called *bilog* or "OS" or "overstaying" -- Filipinos who entered Japan on any kind of visa but decided to stay beyond the period allowed by immigration at the moment of entry, without applying for an extension.

Next in line are those who came on tourist, business, visiting relatives, or language student visas, but whose real purpose for coming to Japan is to work. (Japanese language students are allowed to work for a limited number of hours per week.) Their vulnerability increases as their visas expire, transforming and criminalizing them automatically into overstaying aliens.

As illegal aliens, they become extremely conscious and wary about being found out by the immigration police, detained, interrogated, and subjected to humiliation before finally being deported. As much as possible, they avoid places where Filipinos are known to

congregate. They change residences often.

On my visit one Sunday morning to the place in Ibaraki Prefecture where the twenty-three Filipinos (men and women) worked, he told me that they had violated an important self-imposed rule by coming as a visiting group and fetching me in two cars. As a result, we had to take a longer less traveled route in order to minimize detection by the police.

One of the most extreme cases of paranoia about being found out as an overstaying legal alien was that of Sara (not her real name), a former Filipina entertainer now living in one of the suburbs of Kyoto. She

had come to Japan in 1986 on a fifteen-day tourist visa. She and another Filipina were brought to a small snack bar in Mie-ken, where they entertained and poured drinks to the guests.

After two months the other girl was transferred to another place while she stayed on, well beyond the fifteen day stamp on her passport. The work

was hard and the hours long. On her second month, she fell seriously ill and could not work. One of her regular customers, a construction worker who came from a buraku (outcast or discriminated) community, took pity on her and brought her to a hospital for treatment. He paid for all the bills and did not leave her bedside for three days. On her discharge, he asked her not to go back to the bar anymore, but instead to become his wife. He paid Y100,000 to secure the freedom of Sara.

Conscious that she had overstayed her visa, Sara spent the next four years avoiding any contact with other Filipinos, or going out alone except for very brief visits to the grocery. Her fear of deportation became

FILIPINO MIGRANT WOMEN WORKERS

COUNTRY	NUMBER	NATURE OF WORK
Saudi Arabia	50,000	Domestic helpers, nurses
Japan	51,000	Entertainer
Hong Kong	45,000	(Domestic helpers only)
Spain	42,750	(Domestic helpers only)
Italy	100,000	(Domestic helpers only)
Australia	11,320	Mainly wives of Australians
Britain	20,000	Hospital maids, chambermaids, food workers, domestic helpers, waitresses
Malaysia	5,000	(Domestic helpers only)
Kuwait	5,000	(Domestic helpers only)
Toronto, Canada	5,000	(Domestic helpers only)
U.S.	7,000	Nurses
France	5,000	(Domestic helpers only)
Sweden	500	(Domestic helpers only)

Source: Center for Women's Resources, Estimates only.

TRAGIC HEROINES. Estimates of annual remittances from overseas contract workers range from \$800 million to \$2.5 billion, making labor our most profitable export.

more acute after her two children were born. She dreaded the thought of being separated from her husband and two children. She told them that they wanted so much to formalize their relationship by getting married, so that the children would be recognized as the legitimate children of her husband and thus be entitled to all the services and privileges reserved to Japanese citizens. But the thought of going through the process of securing documents and applying for marriage and the likelihood of being discovered as an overstaying alien in the course of this, was enough to dissuade them from formalizing their union.

They however decided to take the risk after a major car accident which seriously hurt her and her husband. The first impulse of her protective husband was to avoid reporting the accident to the police for fear that his wife might be exposed in the process. He was however persuaded to inform the police because an accident report was required by the insurance company before payments for medical expenses could be made.

This incident led them to seek the help of the community social worker in which they lived. The social worker from the buraku community took a sympathetic view of their situation and assured them that there was nothing to fear from the local government because it was not its business to arrest illegal aliens. This was the business of the Ministry of Justice. Even so, Sara's status as an il-

legal alien remained at the base of her everyday consciousness and conditioned all her activities and relations with other people.

Every overstaying Filipino migrant in Japan knows that at some point in the near future, when it is time to visit the homeland, one will have to give one's self up to the immigration authorities. But every "OS" migrant wishes that this be a voluntary decision. Everyone knows the penalty for overstaying: interroga-

"The work was hard and the hours long. On her sixth month, she fell seriously ill and could not work."

tion at immigration, which everyone prays would be brief, and deportation with prohibition against returning for at least one year.

Most migrants protect themselves against this prohibition by coming to Japan, in the very first instance, under a different name. A big majority (easily more than half) of those who enter Japan for purposes of seeking employment do not use their real names. For instance, when I tried to help the former entertainer Sara, I discovered that she had been using all along a fictitious name. It was the same thing with the twenty-three workers in Ibaraki Prefecture. Only two or three of them used their real names on their passports.

The passports are authentic. It is the names that are fictitious. And the reason for this, they said, is that one's real identity remains protected and is not compromised by all kinds of negative records. Travelling on a fictitious name each time one enters Japan also renders meaningless the one-year ban against the re-entry of deportees.

Sara, the former entertainer, also explained to me that the use of a different name was not her idea but that of the Filipino promoter's, "for her own



MIYUKI-SAN. Half of all the new visitors from the Philippines come as "entertainers."

protection," she was told. Nevertheless, after some time, she said, she felt better that it was not her real name she was using. It was, she said, her way of telling herself that the one that has come to Japan is not her "real" self. In short, it was my impression that psychologically, she was putting a distance between her self and the role she was made to play in Japan: Sara, the entertainer. I would call this the myth of the anonymous self -- a defense mechanism against the often traumatic experiences encountered by migrant workers in Sara's position. Things changed for Sara when she started to live in with her common-law husband, and especially after the children were born. Now she wanted her real identity to be activated, both psychologically and legally.

Inexperience

I would assume from the data that most of the Filipino visitors who have come to Japan are first-time travellers abroad, and would have little if any interest in the culture or history of Japan. Nor would they be inclined to remedy this disability by reading or studying Japanese culture or history.

In fact, what the migrants assiduously imbibed in the quickest possible time is the basic language of the workplace, the essential terms and expressions needed to get by daily with the Japanese *shacho* (boss) or



DOUBLE TROUBLE. A meeting between Filipino women and their prospective Japanese husbands. Docility and diligence, qualities considered desirable to both domestic helpers and prostitutes, are tops in the list of a scouting Japanese.

mama-san. They also borrow from the entertainers certain action recipes for dealing with typical situations at work. These are response formulas which are recommended because they are culturally intelligible and acceptable.

"The average Filipino migrant does not come to Japan to learn its culture as an intellectual object."

Every Filipino worker, student, wife, or entertainer in Japan has favorite observations or definitive views about the Japanese. Such views constitute the principal premises for culturally prescribed ways of handling situations.

One recently-arrived Filipina entertainer in a bar outside Tokyo told me that the Japanese are very conscious about male dominance that they would not tolerate being publicly spurned by a woman, especially a Filipino entertainer. And in this kind of work, she said, one often encounters men who would insist on touching you as a matter of right. The Japanese man must never be shamed, she said. We must gently take his hand, stroking it all the while, and lay it back on the table.

In short, what is accumulated in the first few months of a Filipino migrant's stay in Japan are conventional images of the Japanese as persons, culturally prescribed ways of dealing with them, and practical and acceptable techniques of handling typical situations.

The average Filipino migrant does not come to Japan to learn its culture as an intellectual object. He/she formulates definitions of the Japanese personality and various social situations as a prerequisite for practical survival in an unfamiliar terrain. The best tool for this is Nippongo, although the typical Filipino migrant worker would not, in all likelihood, have the patience to learn the language in school, nor learn the complex *Kanji* characters, preferring instead to memorize vital phrases and meanings as these are actually used or encountered in practical settings of work. This is how the Filipino

protects himself/herself from the vulnerability produced by inexperience and profound unfamiliarity with the host culture.

Loneliness and Isolation within a Homogeneous and Closed Society

For many foreigners, and not just Filipinos, this is probably the greatest source of vulnerability in Japan.

As a long-staying Filipino graduate student told me: "No matter how many years you have stayed in this country, and no matter how well you speak their language, you will never be accepted completely as one of them. It is a closed society. Inherently suspicious and wary of outsiders."

Perhaps more than the Filipinos, it is the Koreans residing in Japan who know this best. I had the opportunity to meet a very intelligent and articulate Korean woman, born in Kyoto of Korean parents, and married to a Japanese man. She was protesting the alien registration law requiring fingerprinting of all alien permanent residents, as well as, from her perception, other discriminatory laws. "I was born in Kyoto," she said, "of Korean parents brought to Japan against their will. I grew up here and was educated here. I pay my taxes like the Japanese and I serve this country as a teacher. But I am Korean by culture and by nationality. Why should I be made to give up my Korean identity in order to be entitled to the rights enjoyed by

Japanese citizens? Why should nationality be submerged under citizenship?"

The problem of isolation that the average Filipino migrant in Japan faces is not of course perceived in these terms. But I bring up this chance meeting with the Korean woman in order to highlight the presence of very rigid legal, cultural, and sociological con-



NOTHING MORE VIOLENT THAN POVERTY. *Poor children growing up without their mothers-turned-dancers; poor children growing up without their mothers-turned-domestic helpers; poor children growing up to be just like their mothers.*

trols aimed at preserving the homogeneity of Japanese society, notwithstanding the constant lip-service paid to "internationalization."

I am shocked that in many Japanese families, marriage to a foreigner is still regarded as "soiling one's *koseki* (family registry)." Perhaps this partly explains a constant and familiar theme in the accounts of Filipinas married to Japanese men: physical violence committed against them not only by their husbands but also by their husbands' parents.

On a visit to Shikoku in November, I talked to Norma (not her real name), a Filipina wife from Kagawa Prefecture. She told me that there were twenty-seven other Filipino women in the small town where she lived, all married to Japanese men. The main complaint of these Filipinas, she said, was the "heavy hand" of their husbands. They beat up their wives at the slightest provocation, especially when they come home drunk. All of the women were former entertainers, though many continued to work in "snack bars" with the consent of their husbands. It is likely that the husbands themselves have not completely accepted their Filipino wives; they probably continue to see them as "dirty women." Norma was in the process of organizing the



FIGHTING BACK.

Filipino wives when I met her. She said there was a felt need among the women to share with one another lessons on how to defend themselves against their husbands and mothers-in-law.

"You have to show you are ready to fight back," said another Filipina who lives in Osaka with her Japanese husband. She had counseled another Filipina who was regularly being battered by her husband and in-laws to pick up a kitchen knife one day to show she was ready to defend herself if they continued to hurt her. That was the last time, she said, that the Filipina wife was beaten up in that family.

Filipino women workers in Kyoto recounted to me how impossible it is for them to rent an apartment in Japan without the endorsement of a Japanese man. This limitation severely reduces their mobility, they said. It is one reason why entertainers find it difficult to free themselves from their dormitory-based captivity by their Japanese promoters and *mame-sans*.

Short of marrying a Japanese man, a situation which has its own share of problems, Filipino women who have come in as entertainers tend to have Japanese boyfriends both as a protection against abusive employers as well as to lessen their isolation.

Shirley (not her real name) has lived in Japan for seven years. She was once married to a Japanese man but was divorced after two years. She has one child who now lives in Manila with Shirley's mother. Shirley works five hours every night in a classy lounge. During the day, she is enrolled for a regular college course. "I have no time to be lonely," she said.

Like many others in her position, she has a Japanese boyfriend, a personable businessman who manages his own small company. He sends Shirley to school. Shirley has no illusion of marrying him someday. He is married and has his own

family.

What is also becoming fairly common is the practice of inviting a brother or a sister or a parent from the Philippines to come to Japan for a short visit, normally three months. These visits have to be sponsored by the Japanese husband. Within those three months, a visiting relative can perform what is known as *arubaito* (part-time) work, and easily earn the plane fare to Japan plus pocket money for the trip back home.

The most impressive case I encountered was that of Marlyn (another pseudonym), whose Filipino husband was employed as a draftsman in an engineering firm. From day



STOP THE TRAFFIC. *Filipina activists in a conference in Japan plot moves to end the exploitation of Filipina entertainers.*

one of her arrival, Marlyn began working in a small *Obento*-making factory. *Obento* is the lunchbox delivered to offices at lunchtime, sold in train stations, or over the counter in many shops.

When I first met her in November, Marlyn had not had any sleep. But she was happy. She told me that she had just completed seventeen hours -- working straight from 4 p.m. of the previous day to 9 a.m. today. She was paid Y750 per hour, plus free meals, and subsidized accommodations. On the average, she worked twelve hours per day, Sundays and holidays included, without fail since she arrived in September. She told me that if she kept her present schedule till the day she left, assuming an eighty-day employment period, she would earn at least Y700,000 or about \$5,000, more than what a university professor in Manila would earn in one year.

"I came here to work and to be with my husband for at least three months," she said. "It is hard work, but I know it is time well spent."

Marlyn certainly works harder than most part-timers I have met in Japan. But her experience is quite common. Many Filipinos come to Japan ostensibly to visit their relatives, but before they do their sightseeing and shopping, they first try to recover what they spent for their plane tickets.

The growing network of relatives with which legitimate Filipino migrant workers in Japan, or those who have married Japanese men, surround themselves is evident during Sundays in most Catholic churches all over Japan.

For longer stays, anywhere from six months to two years, brothers and sisters of Filipino spouses of Japanese nationals usually apply

for a Japanese language student visa. These applications are sponsored by their Japanese brothers-in-law. Some take their language courses seriously. But most others are nominal students, paying the matriculation fee as students in order to justify their stay in the country, but spending most of their time earning a living.

The same pattern of recruitment from within the kin group was exemplified by the

"It is no wonder that intending migrants sometimes pay as much as P70,000 or \$2500 to facilitate the acquisition of a tourist visa to Japan."

twenty-three Filipino workers in the Ibaraki Prefecture. As the operations of the company expand, the demand for guest workers from abroad increases. The workers themselves invite their own relatives to come, their placement in Japan would be no problem, so long as they manage to enter Japan under any visa available.

Since entry into Japan as tourists is very strictly regulated, and hardly any work permits are being issued except for entertainers, it is no wonder that intending migrants sometimes pay as much as P70,000 or \$2,500 to facilitate the acquisition of a tourist visa to Japan. Whether a visa can in fact be had for money is not certain. What is known is that thousands of pesos are paid by many expectant Filipino migrant workers in exchange for a Japanese visa.

This discussion has attempted to show how Filipino workers in Japan have tried to overcome the loneliness, boredom, and isola-



VULNERABILITY AND SURVIVAL. *The author (fifth from left standing) with a group of Filipino workers in a prefecture outside Tokyo, Japan.*

tion that come with working and living in a relatively closed society. The most common remedies are: long working hours and overtime, having a Japanese boyfriend or -- even better -- marrying one, and inviting more relatives to come and work in Japan.

But the preceding discussion also brings us back full circle to the main contention of this paper: that dramatic changes are taking place in the Japanese labor market and the structure of the economy. These changes provide openings for the participation of an increasing number of foreign workers from abroad.

Yet, Japanese immigration laws and policies have lagged far behind, unjustly criminalizing and posing unnecessary impediments to the legitimate participation of foreign workers in the economy. The ones who are allowed to come in with work contracts continue to be treated as guest workers, and therefore not entitled to equal protection as Japanese workers. But the countless others without work permits must suffer the double tribulation of being subject to manipulation, abuse, and super-exploitation by virtue of their illegal status.

Concluding Points

1. In sociological language, Japan may be said to be suffering from a "structural lag." Its economic interactions with other nations have gone far ahead of the readiness of its

own social system to adjust to new conditions. In a large sense, this incapacity probably reflects the Japanese people's own profound psychological resistance to letting the outside world impinge upon their way of life. Japan has remained an essentially closed society. Yet, ironically, at no other time in history has the Japanese economic presence so powerfully shaped the lives of many peoples around the world.

2. Japanese companies and brand names like Toyota, Sony, Mitsubishi and Honda, to name a few, are conquering vast markets and investment territories all over the world. Their global reach and presence clearly overshadow their Japanese origins. They have outgrown the limited visions of their own country's politicians and statesmen, who can mirror the natural apprehensions of a traditional and homogeneous community that is being forced open by the logic of its own economic power.

3. This paradox is at the base of Japan's attitude towards foreign nationals who come to Japan to work. Guest workers are rapidly filling up jobs at the lower rungs of the Japanese labor market, which are being vacated by upwardly mobile Japanese workers. Economic growth has also spawned a rapidly expanding leisure and entertainment industry that relies heavily on foreign workers. The objective need for foreign labor is being satisfied through the mediation of inventive entrepreneurs and criminal syndicates who specialize in circuit-

erating existing restrictions. Yet, inspite of all this, as far as can be gleaned from government pronouncements, until now there appears to be no official acknowledgment that a labor shortage exists in Japan, or that foreign workers perform a vital role in the country's economy. Some observers describe this to a simple lack of coordination among three key departments in the Japanese government, namely, Foreign Affairs, Labor, and Justice (under which immigration matters fall). In an extremely organized society like Japan, this seems incredible.

4. In any event, the result of this ambivalence is the continuous inflow of foreign migrants into Japan under circumstances contrary to existing laws and regulations. It seems inconceivable, given the Japanese bureaucracy's capacity for total surveillance, that the Japanese government has no knowledge of the widespread practice by which Japanese employers hire guest workers without proper work visas. It must therefore be assumed that the government in fact tolerates this practice, even as it continues to regard undocumented foreign workers as deportable aliens for violating the terms of their entry into the country.

5. Under present arrangements, Filipinos come to Japan in any of the following capacities: as entertainers, as tourists, as students, as worker-trainees, as wives to Japanese husbands, and as visiting relatives

to Filipinos married to Japanese nationals. Legitimate working visas are issued only to entertainers and trainees. Majority of those with working visas are in the entertainment-related industries. They come as musicians, singers, dancers and cultural performers, and they are mostly women, forced to work as bar hostesses and prostitutes. A very limited number of Filipino professionals doing white-collar work also obtain work visas. In the past three years, a growing number of factory workers have managed to come in as trainees in Japanese companies that either have branches in the Philippines or are intending to set up overseas operations in the Philippines. In actual fact, they are nothing but disguised cheap labor.

6. Yet, compared to the magnitude of the need, these official channels for entering Japan are grossly inadequate. The situation compels job-seekers to explore alternative modes of entry into Japan. The most common route is still through a tourist visa, which is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain. The student visa (mostly language training) is the next favored mode of entry. In recent years, more Filipinos have also come to Japan under the sponsorship of Japanese men who have married their relatives. They all invariably find jobs in the lucrative labor market. But their essential vulnerability as workers remains for as long as they operate without the proper work permit, and for as long as Japan continues "to need the labor but not the laborer."



LABOR NEEDED, LABORER UNWANTED. As Japan suffers from a "structural lag" migrant workers -- who contribute to making the social system possible -- suffer more.