

# The Various Contexts of Filipino Labor Migration to Japan\*

Ma. Rosario Piquero-Ballescas

This paper has three parts. The first provides a statistical mapping of Filipino migrant workers in various parts of the world, particularly in Japan. The second part deals with a closer profile of certain groups of Filipino workers in Japan — the entertainers and the so-called undocumented Filipino workers. The last part analyzes Filipino labor migration to Japan in terms of its causes, processes, and consequences.

## How Many and Where Are the Filipino Migrant Workers?

### A. The Filipino Workers Throughout the World

The Filipino migrant worker has become very visible throughout the world. Although exact figures are not available, estimates place the number of overseas Filipino workers at around 3.5 million, with about 2 million in the US-Canada region, 500,000 in the Middle East, about 400,000 workers in Western Europe, and an estimated 600,000 in the Asia-Pacific region, including an estimated 300,000 refugees/immigrants in Sabah.<sup>1</sup>

From 1975 to 1990, the Philippine Government has processed the papers of 4,934,260 overseas contract workers. However, if the number of undocumented workers were to be added, the actual number would be more. The bulk of the Filipino overseas workers head for the Middle East, with Asia as the second favored destination (see Table 1). In 1990, of the total 334,883 deployed land-

Table 1. Distribution of Filipino Workers by Region, 1975-1990

Region	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Middle East	1552	7813	25721	3441	73210	102034	163582	211023	323414	311517	306617	302758	309757			
ASIA	4217	5399	5090	9994	12604	17706	20322	31011	40814	43345	54411	76550	96018	(267035)	(241081)	
AMERICA	2285	2165	2265	3369	3736	3706	2343	3782	5654	5832	6690	6696	7502	(92648)	(86196)	
EUROPE	3160	2602	2462	1268	673	846	1126	1463	2878	3724	3675	4225	6610	(79002)	(99622)	
AFRICA	342	473	515	1303	1134	1612	2124*	1078	2353	2146	2054	2072	2125	(7614)	(78302)	
OCEANIA	551	133	139	80	312	165	222	683	2073	1027	844	1129	1344	(1985)	(1741)	
Trust Territories	394	356	264	504	848	1313	1177	1075	3077	3434	3353	4258	5465	(1997)	(1247)	
TOTAL	12501	19221	36676	19961	92519	157994	210936	250095	380263	371066	337754	357687	425881	381892	407974	446991*
SEAMEN	23534	28514	35699	37280	44818	57195	65307	68159	53944	54016	51446	56774	70973	385117	(355356)	(334883)*
GRAND TOTAL	36035	47835	70375	57241	137337	214690	266343	314254	434207	425081	389200	414461	496884	(85913)	(103280)	(111212)*
										(350982)	(372940)	(378214)	(489271)	(477654)	115010	(598766)*
														(471030)	(458626)	(446295)*

SOURCES: Presented in Manolo I. Abella, "Manpower Movement in the Asian Region." Paper read at the Second Japan-ASEAN Forum on International Labor Migration in East Asia, Sept. 26-27, 1991, Tokyo, Japan, p.37 (c).

\*Philippine Overseas Employment Administration in 1991 Philippine Statistical Yearbook.

Figures in parentheses represent deployed migrant workers, the monitoring of which started in May 1983.

based Filipino contract workers, 65% or 218,110 left for the Middle East while 90,768 or 27% headed for various countries in Asia. The rest left for America, Europe, Africa, Oceania, and the Trust Territories.

## **B. The Filipino Migrant Workers in Japan**

Japan has become a major country of destination for a growing number of Filipino workers. In 1960, there were only 390 registered Filipinos in Japan; in 1975, their number rose to 3,035; then to 12,261 in 1985; by 1989, the Filipinos increased to 34,900 and replaced the Americans as the most numerous foreigners in the country, ranking third among the registered foreigners in Japan.<sup>2</sup>

For the period 1975-1990, the Philippines registered as one of the largest labor suppliers to Japan, accounting for a net inflow of 116,696 or 18.4% of the total net inflow of 633,706. This net inflow was characterized by predominantly young Filipinos with about 60% males and about 77% females within the 20-34 age brackets. This large Filipino net inflow to Japan was predominantly female (75.6% of total Filipino net inflow) than male (who constituted 24.4% of the net inflow), resulting in the distinctive high male/female ratio of 3:10.<sup>3</sup>

In terms of status of residence among the 90,530 Filipinos allowed to stay in Japan for the 1982-1989 period, the following categories registered as the four highest: 1.) temporary visitors (68,730); 2.) paid entertainers (20,831); 3.) spouses or children of Japanese nationals (1,925); and 4.) trainees (1,700).<sup>4</sup>

By the end of 1990, out of a total 1,075,317 registrants, 86% were Asians. The Filipino registrants constituted 5% (49,092) of the Asian registrants and about 4.5% of the total foreign registrants.<sup>5</sup> The Filipinos (44,335) followed the Chinese (99,986) and the Brazilians (55,036) with the third highest increase in the number of registrants for the period 1980-1990.<sup>6</sup>

The Office of the Labour Attache of the Philippine Embassy in Japan presented 1991 data on the number of Filipino entertainers and the deported male and female Filipinos for the period 1982 up to the first three months of 1991. This Embassy data, while vague as to its source of statistics and appear higher than those previously presented supports the general observation that more and more Filipino workers are entering Japan. The Embassy data also confirms that significantly large number of Filipinos who enter Japan are entertainers. According to this Philippine Embassy report, 24% of the

Filipinos in 1982 who came to Japan were entertainers. Their number swelled 42% in 1987, 47% in 1987, 47.8% in 1988; it declined to 37% in 1989, and rose again to 39.5% in 1990. A considerable number of Filipinos came to Japan evading legal requirements and were consequently deported. Table 2 shows the Philippine Embassy data.

Table 2. No. of Filipinos and Entertainers who Entered Japan and the No. of Those Deported, Male and Female, 1982-1991

	No. of Filipinos who entered Japan	No. of Entertainers	Number of Deported		
			Total	Male	Female
1982	37878	9125	409	13	396
1983	47878	8395	1041	29	1012
1984	49511	11972	2983	96	2887
1985	65529	17861	3927	340	3587
1986	80508	26029	6297	1500	4697
1987	85267	36039	8027	2253	5774
1988	86567	41423	5386	1688	3698
1989	88296	32719	4495	1503	2992
1990	108292	42867	5062	1793	3233
1991	28893*	11924	**	**	**

Note: \* for January March  
 \*\* data not available

Source: Report of the Office of the Labour Attache of the Philippine Embassy in Japan, 1991

Table 3. Filipino Women Migrant Workers by Country of Destination and Nature of Work

Country	Number	Nature of Work
Saudi Arabia	5000	Domestic Helpers, nurses
Japan	51000	Entertainers
Hong Kong	45000	(Domestic Helpers only)
Spain	40000	(Domestic Helpers only)
Italy	100000	(Domestic Helpers only)
Australia	11000	Mainly wives of Australians
Britain	20000	Hospital maids, chambermaids, food workers, domestics helpers, waitresses
Malaysia	9000	(Domestic Helpers only)
Kuwait	5000	(Domestic Helpers only)
Toronto, Canada	5000	(Domestic Helpers only)
United States	7000	Nurses
France	5000	(Domestic Helpers only)
Sweden	500	(Domestic Helpers only)

Source: Center for Women's Resources. Estimates only, in Randolph S. David, "Filipino Workers in Japan: Vulnerability and Survival," *Kasarinian*, Vol. 6 No. 3, 1st Quarter 1991.

The actual number of Filipino Migrant women, in fact, is much higher than these estimates as those in Germany or in various parts of Africa, for example, have not yet been included in this Table.

## Who are the Filipino Workers in Japan?

As mentioned earlier, Filipinos go to Japan under various visa categories: temporary visitors, students, trainees, professors, spouses or children of Japanese nationals, and entertainers.

The majority of the Filipino females who proceed to Japan work as entertainers.<sup>7</sup> Most are young and single. Entering Japan on a so-called *Koogyo* (entertainer) visa, the Filipino entertainers are considered as guests, not workers. As such, even while most go through the legal channels, they are classified officially as non-workers and are not legally covered by any protective labor law.<sup>8</sup> The majority of the Filipino entertainers who come to Japan are the so-called overseas contract workers (OCWs). According to a 1991 Philippine Embassy Report, about 84% of these OCWs are dancers, 7% are singers, 5% are band players, 2% are magicians, and 2% are gay singers. They have entertainment engagement contracts lasting from three to six months.<sup>9</sup> Some entertainers enter Japan using other visas: as tourists, students, visiting relatives, spouses, or as dependents of a Japanese. There are at least two types of these entertainers who come to Japan on non-contract visas: 1.) those who are promised certain jobs (unrelated to entertaining) before they come to Japan and 2.) those who have no idea at all what jobs await them in Japan. The first type often find that promises made earlier in the Philippines are broken and not honored in Japan. Many find themselves forced into direct prostitution. Those who fall under the second type also express the same experience and are forced into direct sexual activities because they have to repay the expenses defrayed for their trip to Japan. Most of the OCWs stay for a 6-month contract and return to the Philippines. Many, however, opt to stay legally through marriage with a Japanese, or illegally (without the proper legal requirements for staying in Japan and without the legal permit for engaging in a particular job while in Japan) and join the ranks of the so-called 'overstayers' (OS). There are no exact statistics about these so-called OS in Japan.<sup>10</sup> Professor Hiromi Mori of Hosei University estimated that there are "approximately 220 thousand unregistered foreign nationals (UFNs) as of 1990...who may be regarded as illegal immigrant workers who continue to reside beyond the period of time given at landing in order to engage in economic activities."<sup>11</sup>

The Philippine Embassy in Japan recorded about 70,428 overstaying Filipinos. The stock estimates of the Filipinos in Japan for the first quarter of 1990 are as follows:<sup>12</sup>

Domestic Helpers	(3,120) = 2.2%
Trainees	(5,174) = 3.64%
Teachers/engineers/ Unskilled Workers	(1,783) = 1.25%
Entertainers	(61,432) = 43.28%
Illegals	(70,428) = 49.61%

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TOTAL 141,937

### **Introducing the 'Undocumented' Filipino Workers**

From October 1991 to March 1992, this researcher engaged in an exploratory study about Filipino entertainers in Japan with the support of the Philippine Embassy and the kind assistance of many Filipino workers as well as Japanese friends in Japan. While the focus of the study was on entertainers, by December 1991 an attempt to survey other Filipino workers was made. Questionnaires were distributed to known Filipino workers who in turn distributed, collected, and submitted the answered forms to other Filipino workers. Being exploratory, only a hundred copies were disseminated, of which 64 were returned. Out of 64, 4 respondents (3 females and 1 male) reported having valid working visas and the Alien Certificate of Registration (ACR or the so-called 'blue book') while 60 did not have the ACR despite their more than six-months stay in Japan. The subsequent discussion shall present the results of the exploratory survey of these 60 Filipino overstayers, which, although limited and, therefore, inconclusive, can present areas for future research regarding these so-called 'concealed' workers.

#### **1. Personal Sketches of the Filipino Workers**

The 60 worker-respondents in this survey engage in three major types of work: entertainment (18 respondents, all females); manufacturing (31 respondents, 6 females and 25 males); and construction (11 respondents, all male). Fourteen of the entertainers are single, while 2 are married and 2 have been separated. All the 6 females engaged in manufacture are married, with one widowed. Twenty-one of the males in manufacturing and 6 of the 11 males in construction are married (See Table 4). In terms of age, the Filipino entertainers are younger than their female counterparts in manufacture. About 72% of the entertainers belong to the 20-24 age bracket with the remaining 28% falling under the 25-29 age bracket.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, the Filipino women workers in the manufacturing sector are older, between the ages 35 to 44. More Filipino male workers in the

manufacturing sector are within the 30-45 or older category. The youngest male worker respondent is 19 years old and does construction work. Half of his companions at work fall within the 20-29 age bracket, while the other half are 30 years old or older (Table 5 shows this age distribution).

Table 4. Type of Filipino Workers in Japan by Gender, Civil Status

Type of Worker	Total	GENDER		CIVIL STATUS			
		Female	Male	Single	Married	Separated	Widowed
Entertainer	18	18	0	14	2	2	0
Manufacturing	31	6	25	6	22	2	1
Construction	11	0	11	4	6	1	0
Total	60	24	36	24	30	5	1

Table 5. Type of Filipino Workers in Japan by Age

Type of Worker	No Answers	AGE						
		15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-up
Entertainer	0	0	13	5	0	0	0	0
Manufacturing								
(Female)	1	0	0	0	0	2	3	0
(Male)	1	0	1	6	5	8	3	1
Construction	0	1	1	4	2	3	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	2	1	15	15	7	13	6	1

The 60 worker-respondents were born in various parts of the Philippines with about 57% (n=34) coming from various provinces of Luzon such as Nueva Ecija, Bataan, Batangas, Laguna, Bicol, Sorsogon, and Masbate. Two were born in Mindanao (Agusan and Davao del Sur), 8 in the Visayas (Cebu and Romblon), and 9 born in Metro Manila (Quezon City, Manila, and Rizal). Immediately before leaving for Japan, about 47% resided in Luzon, about 37% in Metro Manila, and about 7% in the Visayas (see Table 6a).

About 60% of the worker-respondents resided in the same area where they were born before they proceeded to Japan. There were, however, about 30% of them who had migrated from their birthplaces to other parts of the Philippines before their trip to Japan (this local migration information is shown in Table

6b.) Fifty-three percent of these workers reached college while 37% reached high school. Five of the six women workers engaged in manufacture obtained college education while only 28% of the female entertainers reached college. About 61% of the entertainers reached high school (see Table 7).

Table 6a. Type of Filipino Workers in Japan by Birthplace & Address Before Going to Japan

Type of Workers	Birthplace					Address Before Going to Japan				
	M. Manila	Other	Visayas	Mindanao	No Answer	M. Manila	Other	Visayas	Mindanao	No Answer
Entertainers	0	13	1	2	2	4	12	0	0	2
Manufacturing	8	13	4	0	4	17	8	3	0	3
Construction	1	9	0	0	1	1	9	0	0	1
TOTAL	9	35	7	2	7	22	29	4	0	6

Table 6b. Type of Filipino Workers in Japan by Local Migration

Type of Workers	No Answers	Yes	No
Entertainers	2	5	11
Manufacturing	3	13	15
Construction	1	0	10
TOTAL	6	18	36

Table 7. Type of Filipino Workers in Japan by Educational Attainment

Type of Worker	No Answers	Elementary	HighSchool	College
Entertainers	2	0	11	5
Manufacturing	2	1	7	21
Construction	1	0	22	6
TOTAL	5	1	40	32

While in the Philippines, about 52% of the respondents had jobs. Only one entertainer worked in a related job, as a dancer. The rest of the entertainers worked as secretaries, as a post office employee, a clerk, a dressmaker, or as store helpers. Three of the women respondents now engaged in manufacturing work in Japan used to work as a vendor, an office worker, and as a dressmaker back in the Philippines. Only 2 of the male workers now engaged in construction worked in a similar sector in the Philippines. The rest worked as a bus conductor, a ticket



disburser in a cockpit, and a product quality control inspector. Those who are at present in construction work in Japan used to be a building inspector, a bus conductor, a serviceman, a machine shop worker, a management consultant, a clerk, a sari-sari store owner, a barber, a government office employee, and a member of the Integrated National Police in the Philippines. Table 8 shows the workers' previous type of employment in the Philippines. For the jobs enumerated above, three workers received a monthly salary of P999<sup>14</sup> or less, while 13 received monthly salaries ranging from P1000 to P4000 or more (see Table 9).

Table 8. Type of Filipino Workers in Japan by

Type of Work in Japan vs. Type of Work in the Philippines before going to Japan

Type of Worker in Japan	No Answer	With Job	No Job	No Answer	Entertainer	Construct	Services	Others
Entertainer	1	8	9	10	1	0	6	1
Manufacturing	2	19	11	14	0	2	8	7
Construction	0	5	6	6	0	2	2	1
TOTAL	3	31	26	30	1	4	16	9

Table 9. Type of Filipino Workers in Japan by Monthly Salary in the Philippines [in pesos]

Type of Workers	No Answer	999 or less	1000-199	2000-299	3000-399	4000 or more	Unspecified
Entertainer	11	1	2	1	1	0	0
Manufacturing	19	1	2	2	1	3	3
Construction	8	1	0	0	0	1	1
TOTAL	38	3	4	3	2	4	4

## 2. The Household Background of the Filipino Workers

Most Filipino workers come from large households. About 63% have from 5 to 12 siblings while about 23% have from 2 to 4 siblings. Most of the workers (n=49 or 82%) are among the first five oldest in their family. About 15% of the workers are the youngest in their family. Table 10 shows the data on sibling number and sibling order of the Filipino workers.

Very few workers answered the questions regarding their parents' educational attainment. The limited information showed 6 have fathers with high school education and one with college education. On the other hand, 2 have mothers who attended elementary school; 7, high school; and 1, college (see Table 11).

Table 10. Type of Filipino Workers in Japan by Sibling Number and Sibling Order

Type of Worker	No Answer	Sibling Number			Sibling Order		
		2-4	5-7	8-1	1st-5th	6th-10th	Youngest
Entertainer	1	4	9	4	13	2	3
Manufacturing	5	7	10	9	27	0	4
Construction	2	3	3	3	9	0	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	8	14	22	16	49	2	9

Table 11. Type of Filipino Workers by Parent's Education

Type of Worker	No Answer	Father			Mother			
		Elem.	High School	College	No Answer	Elem.	High School	College
Entertainer	12	0	6	0	11	1	5	1
Manufacturing	30	0	0	1	29	1	1	0
Construction	10	0	1	0	10	0	1	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	52	0	7	1	50	2	7	1

Again, not many volunteer information regarding their parents' occupations. Some of the workers' fathers were farmers, two were housekeepers, one worked as a teacher, 3 in construction, 3 in services, and 1 in manufacturing. Two mothers were farmers, one was a teacher, 4 were housekeepers while another 4 worked in the services. This limited information regarding the occupation of the workers' parents is presented in Table 12.

Table 12. Type of Filipino Workers in Japan by Parent's Occupation

Type of Worker	Father								Mother					
	No Ans.	No Job	Comm.	Serv.	Agri.	Manr.	Worker	House Keeper	No Answer	No Job	Services	Agri.	Teacher	House Keeper
Entertainer	6	1	3	2	3	1	0	2	9	0	3	2	1	3
Manufacturing	30	0	0		0	0	1	0	29	1	0	0	0	1
Construction	9	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	10	0	1	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	45	1	3	3	4	1	1	2	48	1	4	2	1	4

### 3. The Decision to Work in Japan

While in the Philippines, the respondents learn of job opportunities in Japan from friends, neighbors, or relatives (see Table 13). This job-information network seems to be intimate since a number (17 or 28%) of the workers in Japan are working together with those who earlier informed them of the jobs (see

Table 14). The close-knit character of this network seems to be supported further by the presence of relatives in Japan -- of about 23 (38%) out of the 60 workers included in this survey (see Table 15).

Table 13. Type of Filipino Workers in Japan by How Jobs in Japan are Known.

Type of Worker	No Answer	Through Relative	Through Friend	Through Neighbor	Through Friend/Neighbor/Relative
Entertainer	0	1	11	4	2
Manufacturing	2	7	20	0	2
Construction	1	1	8	0	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	3	9	39	4	5

Table 14. Type of Filipino Workers by Work with Informants

Type of Worker	With informant in Japan		
	Yes	No	No Answer
Entertainer	2	15	1
Manufacturing	13	16	2
Construction	2	8	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	17	39	4

Table 15. Type of Filipino Workers by Relatives in Japan

Type of Worker	With Relatives in Japan		
	Yes	No	No Answer
Entertainer	3	15	0
Manufacturing	16	15	0
Construction	4	6	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	23	36	1

The decision to go to Japan is often determined by the worker's desire to earn money, to help the family, to look for work, and to improve one's living conditions. The entertainers, in particular, decide to work in Japan to help their family (see Table 16). Relatives or neighbors who have gone ahead to Japan facilitate the necessary preparations. It is not uncommon to find workers at one

work site in Japan who are related to one another either in terms of sanguinity, common address, or friendship dating way back in the Philippines.

Table 16. Type of Filipino Workers in Japan by Reason for Going to Japan

Type of Worker	No Answer	Look for Work	Earn(more) Money	Help Family	Improve living conditions
Entertainer	1	0	1	15	1
Manufacturing	3	10	15	2	1
Construction	2	2	6	1	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	6	12	22	18	2

#### 4. Work in Japan

Japan is the first foreign country visited by about 72% of the respondents. About 25% have visited and/or worked in other countries aside from Japan (see Table 17). For 68% of the respondents, their present job is their first job in Japan. This is true for the majority of the entertainers and those in manufacturing and in construction (see Table 18).

Table 17. Type of Filipino Workers in Japan by Countries Visited other than Japan.

Type of Worker	Yes	No	No Answer
Entertainer	0	18	0
Manufacturing	12	18	1
Construction	3	7	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	15	43	2

Table 18. Type of Filipino Workers in Japan by First Job

Type of Worker	Yes	No	No Answer
Entertainer	15	2	1
Manufacturing	18	12	1
Construction	8	2	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	41	16	3

For about 8 workers, their present job is not their first; neither is their visit to Japan their first. One respondent first came in 1984, worked as an entertainer, went back to the Philippines, and returned to Japan as an entertainer in 1986. One present construction worker first came in 1985 and stayed for 2 years, left for the Philippines, and returned to Japan in 1988. Another came in 1987, stayed for 3 months, left for home, then later returned to work in Japan. Three of those who are at present engaged in construction first came in 1986, two stayed for some months and returned to the Philippines, while one stayed on in Japan. Another construction worker first came to Japan in 1987, stayed and worked for a year, returned to the Philippines, and after two years, came back to work in Japan in 1989. One entered Japan in 1990 and has since stayed on with his present construction job in Japan.

Sixty percent of the Filipino workers surveyed work in sites with less than 50 workers. Thirty two percent work for establishments with more than 50 workers. The percentage of Filipinos relative to the total number of workers in specific sectors covered in this study are shown on Table 19. Half of the workers work 8 hours a day. Sixty six percent of the entertainers work for only 6 to 7 hours, starting at 7 in the evening and calling it a day by 1 or 2 in the morning. Only the workers in manufacture reported doing 9 or more hours of work (see Table 20). Half of the workers work about 6 days a week or for 26 days or less while about 23% work from 27 to 30 days per month (see Table 21).

Table 19. Type of Filipino Workers in Japan

Type of Worker	By Total No. of Workers at Work Site					% Of Filipino Workers at Work Site				
	No Ans.	15 or less	16-49	50-100	200 or more	No Ans.	25% or less	26 - 50%	51 - 75%	76 - 100%
Entertainer	1	17	0	0	0	3	1	0	4	10
Manufacturing	7	5	1	10	8	7	12	8	2	2
Construction	3	4	3	0	1	4	3	1	3	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>

Table 20. Type of Filipino Workers in Japan by Working Hours per Day

Type of Worker	6-7	8	9 Or More	No Answer
Entertainer	12	6	0	0
Manufacturing	0	15	14	2
Construction	0	9	0	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>4</b>

Table 21. Type of Filipino Workers in Japan by Number of Working Days per Month

Type of Worker	26 or less	27-30	Others	No Answer
Entertainer	6	12	0	0
Manufacturing	27	2	1	1
Construction	7	0	1	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>

Filipino male workers seem to be paid more in manufacturing than their Filipino female counterparts. Twelve (about 39%) of the male workers are paid more than ¥1000 per hour, 29% of the other male workers are paid ¥1000 or less, just like 13% of the female workers in manufacture. The entertainers also receive a higher hourly rate compared to the female workers in manufacture. Table 22 presents the details of this differentiated hourly wage. About 40% of the workers reported receiving a monthly salary higher than ¥180,000 while 25% received less than ¥180,000.

Table 22. Type of Filipino Workers in Japan by Hourly Wage in Japanese Yen [JPY] Male and Female

Type of Worker	Male				
	JPY750 or less	JPY751-1000	JPY1001-1500	JPY1501-more	No Answer
Entertainer	-	-	-	-	-
Manufacturing	1	8	10	2	4
Construction	0	0	7	0	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>

Type of Worker	Female				
	JPY750 or less	JPY751-1000	JPY1001-1500	JPY1501-more	No Answer
Entertainer	0	13*	1	1	3
Manufacturing	3	1	0	0	2
Construction	-	-	-	-	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>

Seventy percent of the workers stated that their monthly salary was sufficient to support their families in the Philippines (see Table 23) and 65% of the workers are the main and/or sole breadwinners of their family (See Table 24). The monthly salary in Japan definitely dwarfs the workers' monthly salary in the Philippines. Coupled with the regularity of their work in Japan, although clandestine by definition, workers have expressed uncertainty about how much longer they intend to stay in Japan. Table 25 notes that about 82% of the surveyed Filipino workers are uncertain about the length of their stay in Japan, despite their confirmation of unequal pay among workers (see Table 26) and their Japanese counterparts receiving more for the same work, despite the absence of other benefits such as adequate housing, insurance, and bonuses which their Japanese counterparts get, and despite reports of problems of loneliness and alienation within the Japanese society. These Filipino workers want to stay on in Japan until such time that they can fulfill their plans to set up their own businesses, uplift and secure the condition of their family, or be able to buy their own house and lot upon their return to the Philippines (see Table 27).

Table 23. Type of Filipino Workers in Japan by Salary Sufficient for Family in the Phils.

Type of Worker	Yes	No	No Answer
Entertainer	13	5	0
Manufacturing	22	7	2
Construction	7	2	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>4</b>

Table 24. Type of Filipino Workers in Japan by Worker Sole/Main Breadwinner of Family

Type of Worker	Yes	No	No Answer
Entertainer	11	7	0
Manufacturing	21	8	2
Construction	7	3	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>3</b>

Aside from long distance phone calls, they maintain communication with their families in the Philippines through letters, tapes, and remittances.

Alone in their rooms or with friends, they listen to music, watch Japanese TV programs that they can understand, or watch video tapes. They also voraciously read whatever Filipino newspaper, magazine, or comics come their way.

Though they have several Japanese friends, whenever they have problems, they reach out to other Filipino relatives or friend or to God for comfort, advice, and solace. Deep in their hearts they know that there is no place better than home. Because their country as yet cannot provide for their personal and household needs, they reluctantly stay on and work hard until they can sufficiently provide for their families with the hope that someday they can go home and be assured that they do not have to go abroad to work and be separated ever again. This is their dream for themselves and their families.

## **Filipino Migrant Labor in Japan: Its Various Explanations**

Various contexts have been offered to the causes of Filipino overseas migration. The microscopic context explains this phenomenon in terms of individual, demographic, or societal factors that push Filipinos to migrate, on the one hand, and of the pull factors (individual, demographic, or societal) associated with the receiving country on the other.

A Filipino economist explains the high migration propensity of the Filipinos in terms of the history and flexibility of the Philippine labor market. The positive experiences of the Filipinos under American colonial rule as well as the success stories of Filipino migrants to America "have engendered in the average Filipino a very positive attitude toward overseas employment. This explains his greater willingness to take the risk of difficult adjustments in places of very alien culture and physical environment."<sup>15</sup> "The Philippine educational system has produced and continues to produce graduates whose skills are applicable not only for the domestic but also the foreign labor market...[t]his labor market flexibility is another important explanation of the large and continuous outflow of labor."<sup>16</sup>

Within the microscopic context, Filipino labor migration is explained in terms of the popular push factors such as overpopulation, high unemployment and underemployment rate, poverty, and others. The present Philippine population



is estimated at 62 million and continues to grow fast. Production and resources are inadequate to provide for this large number resulting in more than half of the Filipinos living in poverty, unable to meet their basic food, clothing, and shelter needs. Both the unemployment and underemployment rates remained at a high average of 9.1 % and 23.2 %, respectively, over the last six years.<sup>17</sup> Because of this problematic national situation, many Filipinos resort to overseas migration.

While the past waves of Filipino migration showed them in large numbers heading for America, Guam, or the Middle East, their movement towards Japan, in particular, is a recent phenomenon, conspicuously increasing only from the 70s up to the present. The labor movement of various sending countries towards Japan, including the Philippines, has been explained, also, in terms of internal pull factors peculiar to the Japanese people and society.

Some of these significant internal pull factors are: 1.) labor shortage affected by declining growth rate and consequent aging of the Japanese population,<sup>18</sup> particularly in construction and manufacturing, reflecting the changing negative attitudes of many young Japanese towards the 3Ks type, viz., *kitanai* (dirty), *kiken* (hazardous), and *kitsui* (physically hard) work<sup>19</sup>; and 2.) the expansion of the Japanese economy, the appreciation of the yen,<sup>20</sup> and the spectacular increase in the average wage and per capita income among the Japanese work force.<sup>21</sup>

Sassen<sup>22</sup> has criticized microscopic explanations of international labor migration for being inadequate. She proposed an alternative context for explaining global labor movements, i.e., to view international labor migration as part and parcel of the present international development and movement of capital.

Specifically, she suggested a comprehensive examination of objective and ideological linkages between the sending and receiving countries,<sup>23</sup> locating these linkages within the context of the global capitalist system.

Applying this macroscopic context to the specific phenomenon of the Filipino labor migration to Japan clarifies why Filipinos headed for Japan in the 70s and why they continue to do so despite strict Japanese immigration policies. Filipino labor migration is also shown to be part of an international movement of labor required by the present international capitalist system.

On the other hand, Sassen's theoretical framework situates the active economic expansion of Japan not as a sole consequence of internal characteristics of the Japanese people and society but as a significant redefinition of Japan's role for the further international mobility of capital.

The Filipinos had very negative feelings towards the Japanese who cruelly invaded and controlled them during World War II. The turning point in Philippine-Japan relations was the ratification in 1973 of the *Philippine-Japanese Treaty of Amity, Commerce, and Navigation* by the Marcos regime. This treaty opened the door to massive Japanese trade and investments making Japan today's top ranking trading partner, a top foreign investor, and a most generous donor of aid to the Philippines.<sup>24</sup>

The Japanese economic presence in the Philippines rapidly spread to Philippine agriculture (land, sea, forests), to manufacturing and industry, to the services, and even to entertainment with the entry of Japanese toys and cartoons. The Philippines, according to Constantino, was "transformed into Japan's backyard garden, supplying the latter with sugar, bananas, canned pineapples, mangoes, and soybean; a rich source of wood products, iron ore, copper concentrates and other minerals; a sweat shop for the production of textiles and electronic appliances meant for exportation to rival capitalist markets of Europe and America; and a market for Japanese finished products, from cars to colored TV sets."<sup>25</sup> This economic linkage of the Philippines to Japan was lopsided in favor of Japan, thereby further aggravating the Philippines' existing foreign exchange problems.<sup>26</sup>

With the continuing problematic economic situation in the Philippines -- high unemployment and underemployment levels, inadequate wages, dependent industrialization, low agricultural production, increasing landlessness, massive exodus to the cities, and a worsening massive poverty of a demographically active population throughout many regions -- Filipinos are prepared to work overseas to help their families survive.<sup>27</sup> Due to their growing familiarity with the conspicuous Japanese investors, traders, officials, volunteers, students, and tourists and their attraction to the Land of the Rising Yen, Japan became a new country of destination for the Filipino migrant workers since the Marcos authoritarian era. With success stories spread by returning Filipinos, and with existing interpersonal networks already in place in Japan, the number of Filipino workers going to Japan continues to increase. Hence, objective and subjective factors, both international and local, merged to cause Filipino migration to Japan.

When the Filipinos began to head towards Japan in increasing numbers in the 1970s and 1980s, the Philippines, like many other countries in the Third World, was observed to have shifted into a new role as an industrial neo-colony, providing cheap labor and sub-contracting services as well as export processing zones for capitalist centers including Japan.<sup>28</sup>

The new role of the Philippines and many Third World countries as production sites and sources of cheap labor emerged as the present mechanisms of the global capitalist centers resolve their internal conflicts and crises to continue the expansion of capital.<sup>29</sup> This present stage of world capitalism requires the Third World countries, including the Philippines, to remain within the orbit of capitalism, through the internationalization of productive forces and relations that are under the control of transnational corporations (TNCs).<sup>30</sup> In close relation to the changed role of countries like the Philippines, this present stage of world capitalism has also witnessed what Sassen describes as the rise of global cities characterized by highly specialized services, high-level, specialized jobs, corporate headquarters, complex, high technology industries and new economies that generate massive expansion in the supply of low-wage jobs.<sup>31</sup>

Taken in this context, the internationalization of the Japanese economy, according to Sassen, has brought with it the possibility of employing foreign workers in a country where this was inconceivable a few years ago.

Japan's active economy and Filipino labor migration towards Japan are actually interrelated processes within the present global capitalist system. Within this sphere, economies like that of the Philippines, cease to be national; these economies become extensions of the economy of the advanced capitalist economies like Japan, the United States, and the West European industrial countries.

It may not be incorrect to view countries like the Philippines as being transformed at present into the informal sector of this globalized formal economy. Cheap unskilled labor is in abundant supply and dependent upon the demand for it by the formal sector. This time, however, the informal sector has been internationalized, beyond national boundaries, in keeping with the globalized formal capitalist system; the labor-sending countries have become the labor-demanding countries' huge and abused informal sector.

Filipino labor migration to Japan is a reflection of the present gradual transformation and incorporation of the Philippine economy into an informal sector of the global capitalist world.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>This Article first appeared in the *Tsukuba Journal of Sociology*, No. 18, March 1993.

<sup>2</sup>These estimates were made by the Friends of Filipino Migrant Workers, Inc. or popularly

known as *Kaibigan* as reported in a 1992 National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) report entitled "A Study on the Filipino Overseas Contract Workers and the Government's Labor Export Program," p. 3.

- <sup>2</sup> See Table 1 presented by Shigemi Kono, "International Migration in Japan: A Demographic Sketch," *Regional Development Dialogue*, Vol. 12, No. 3, Autumn 1991, p. 43.
- <sup>3</sup> Mori Hiromi, "Structural Changes in Contemporary Japanese Labour Market and Immigrant Workers." Paper presented at the Second Japan-ASEAN Forum on International Labour Migration in East Asia, September 26-27, 1991, Tokyo, Japan. See Table 2-1 and Table 2-2 for more details regarding this net inflow which Prof. Mori defined as disembarkation and embarkation differentials.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, See Table 2-13, p. 41.
- <sup>5</sup> *Annual Report of Statistics on Legal Migrants*, Immigration Bureau, Ministry of Justice as reported in Mori, See Table 2-4, p. 42.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, See Table 2-5.
- <sup>7</sup> Elsewhere in the World, the Filipino women work as domestic helpers, nurses, hospital maids, chambermaids, and food workers. A number of them migrate to become brides or wives via the mail-order bride system. Table 3 shows estimates of Filipino migrant women workers gathered by the Center for Women's Resources.
- <sup>8</sup> Discussion on entertainers taken from Ma Rosario P. Ballescas, *The Filipino Entertainers in Japan: An Introduction*, a forthcoming publication.
- <sup>9</sup> Ricardo R. Casco, "Japan's Entertainer Market: Should the Show Go On?," Overseas Employment Info Series, Vol. 3, No. 1, March-April, 1990, p. 40.
- <sup>10</sup> The literature has varied labels for them such as "illegal aliens," "undocumented contract workers," "concealed, disguised, or clandestine labor," or "unregistered foreign nationals."
- <sup>11</sup> Hiromi, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
- <sup>12</sup> Elena Samonte, "Philippine-Japan Relations: Can We Go Beyond Economic Parameters?," 1990, as cited in Randolph S. David, "Filipino Workers in Japan: Vulnerability and Survival," *Kasarinlan*, Vol. 6, No. 31, 1st Quarter, p. 13.
- <sup>13</sup> There is a possibility that these entertainers may be younger than their reported ages. As discovered in our other research entitled *The Filipino Entertainers in Japan*, 1992, entertainers tend to hide their real age because of Philippine Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) policy that prescribes that only Filipino females, 23 years old or older be allowed to go as Overseas Contract Workers (OCWs) to Japan.
- <sup>14</sup> One hundred Yen (¥100) = (Peso) ₱0.1999 as of October 29, 1992.
- <sup>15</sup> See Edita A. Tan, "Overseas Employment, Savings Rate and Income Distribution: The Philippine Case." Paper delivered at the Second Japan-ASEAN Forum on International Labor Migration in East Asia, 26-27 September, 1991, Tokyo, Japan, pp. 8-11.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.
- <sup>17</sup> *Sunstar Daily*, November 23, 1992.
- <sup>18</sup> Abella, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-18.
- <sup>19</sup> Kono, *op. cit.*, p. 44.
- <sup>20</sup> Yasuo Kuwahara, "Untied Knots: Migration and Development in Asia." Paper delivered at the Second Japan-Asian Forum on International Labor Migration in East Asia, 26-27 September, 1991, Tokyo, Japan, p. 8.
- <sup>21</sup> Kono, *op. cit.*, p. 45.
- <sup>22</sup> Saskia Sassen, *The Mobility of Labor and Capital* (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- <sup>24</sup> See Renato Constantino for more details regarding this "invasion of the Philippines by the Japanese capital" in *The Second Invasion, Japan in the Philippines*, Quezon City: Karrel Inc., 1989, pp. 44-45. See also Mamoru Tsuda, *A Preliminary Study of Japanese-Filipino Joint Ventures* (Quezon City: Foundation for Nationalist Studies, 1978) and Ma Rosario P. Ballescas, "A Study of Japanese Participation in Philippine Agriculture." Report submitted to the Japan Institute of International Affairs, February, 1988.
- <sup>25</sup> Constantino, *ibid.*, p. 46.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.
- <sup>27</sup> For more discussion of the consequences of the Marcos regime, refer to Ma Rosario P. Ballescas, *Filipin No Kodomotachi Wa Naze Hataraku No Ka* (Tokyo, Akaishi Shoten, 1991).
- <sup>28</sup> Merlin Magallona, "A Contribution to the Study of Feudalism and Capitalism in the Philippines," in *Feudalism and Capitalism in the Philippines* (Quezon City: Foundation for Nationalist Studies), pp. 14-44.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.
- <sup>30</sup> Magallona, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
- <sup>31</sup> Sassen, *op. cit.*, p. 126.