

Children of the Pearl, Children of the Sun: An Outrospective Look on Japanese-Filipino Families, Filipino-Japanese Individuals and Their Trajectories

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Introduction

The member nations of ASEAN are setting their sights on regional economic integration by 2015; one of the provisions involves less restricted travel between workers of member countries. With the increased permeability of borders, it is only natural that intermarriages could result. Such unions would produce offspring who may imbibe the cultures of both parents, resulting in various third cultures. It is important therefore, to look at the recent history of migration between Japan and the Philippines, and at Japanese Filipino Children, in order to foresee the issues that these new Southeast Asians are likely to encounter.

According to the definition of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Japanese Filipino Children or JFC “are children born to Japanese and Filipino parents from around the years of rapid economic growth in Japan in the 1980s and up to the present. The majority of JFCs have Japanese fathers and Filipina mothers.” [IOM 2011].

Filipino-Japanese appear when there is significant interaction between Japan and the Philippines. Before World War II, Japan expanded its economic activities in the country by establishing retail and wholesale stores all over the archipelago. Japanese migrants grew commodities like Manila hemp in areas like Davao. There were as many as 839 Japanese retailers and 67 wholesalers during the 1930s all over the country. [Shinzo 2003, 177].

Japanese businessmen and workers intermarried with Filipinos; their children were called *Firipin Nikkeijin* (Filipinos of Japanese Descent) and most of them got separated from their Japanese parents at the outbreak of the war. The second and third generation Japanese descendants of this group often hid their identities to avoid stigma

arising from anti-Japanese sentiments following the global conflict. By the 1980s, these generations were able to successfully frame their narrative, resulting in a clamor from the Japanese public for its government to assist in the return migration of the *Nikkeijin*. [Fresnoza-Flot, 2008]

Because of war-stigma, these descendants prefer to think of themselves as *Firipin Zanryu Nihonjin*, which translates as “Japanese left behind in the Philippines.” [Ohno 2008, 4 - 8] Although this minority was marginalized in the middle of the last century, they were later able to legitimize themselves and gather strength not only through their ability to transmigrate between the borders of their two countries but because of their strong sense of solidarity [Fresnoza Flot 2008].

The *Nikkeijin* were only the first batch. In the 1970s, President Marcos encouraged Japanese investment in the Philippines. This resulted in a second wave of businessmen establishing enterprises in the country [Abinales 2010]. Children with mixed roots also appeared during this time but there has been hardly any research on this generation and their numbers are unknown.

The roots of JFC, the newest batch of *Firipino hafu* (half Filipino), are different from the other two in the sense that it resulted from the largely feminized migration of Filipina entertainers to Japan in the 1980s and '90s. According to estimates of the Ministry of Justice, JFC possibly number up to 200,000 or more. [IOM 2012, 8] I personally find this figure specious as the ministry arrived at this computation by multiplying the number of Filipinas who have the Spouse of Japanese National visas by two. What about JFC who were born out of wedlock or whose mothers are overstayers, or who are staying in Japan under different visa categories?

Since the population is significant, JFC have drawn the attention of scholars, particularly those whose interests lie in migration studies. It is from these scholars that this researcher first saw the initial data on JFC; their findings consequently piqued my interest to undergo my own search for answers on why there are so many. When I became a participant in the 2009 Tokyo International Conference on Japanese Filipino Children organized by the IOM, this further catalyzed my interest into looking at a phenomenon that also probably has ties to my own sense of identity.

Although I was born in 1979 in the Philippines and am a member of the second wave of mixed-roots children, the JFC and I share many similar experiences and qualities. The only difference between us is that my father was the one who migrated to the Philippines and my mother there, while for the JFCs it was their mothers who migrated to Japan and met their Japanese spouses there. Like a majority of JFCs, I was raised (though in the Philippines) by a single mother; my parents separated when I was barely three years old, due to my father's extra-marital adventures with women, pot and guns, or so my mother alleges. Most JFC have obvious Japanese physical features; whenever I introduce myself in Filipino to a new person, he or she is often surprised and asks a follow up question of whether I speak Nihongo. Once, when I said no, the other person called me "*bilaw na Hapon*" or "half-cooked Japanese." The intimate nature of the women's work and reports of prostitution from journalists and academics [Parrenas 2010, Introduction] caused the entertainers to face a backlash of discrimination. Conservatives in Filipino society stigmatize JFC for being born out of wedlock and being children of Japayuki. Although my father and mother were married, this legality meant little; one grade-school classmate of mine called my mother a Japayuki. The JFC and I also previously shared the same issues with nationality. After a landmark decision of the Japanese Supreme Court on the nationality of illegitimate children in 2008, JFC whose papers were in order were able to cross the border so long

as their fathers were found and their links were established. Although I believed I was a legitimate child, it was unknown if my father put me in his family register. What is certain that he did not register me with the Japanese embassy and I have since lost the chance to become Japanese.

This quest to understand the dynamics of the issue led me to pursue my own initiatives. I attempted to lead a transnational group of JFC through the Internet and even participated in a social enterprise. When these moves failed, I joined a JFC youth group, BATIS YOGHI, and built friendships with its members. Ultimately, I ended up identifying with each individual in this company and when it was time to pursue an objective and disinterested investigation through my API Fellowship period, the personal, psychological, and holistic impacts constantly harried my consciousness.

Initially the objectives of my project were to synthesize the findings of research done on the JFC, and to instruct JFCs themselves on the situation of so many others in Japan so that they might make better and proactive choices amid the social realities in the two countries of our parents. Literature on the matter was few and far between; most of the researchers who wrote papers hankered for publication in journals. What was telling at the time was that the further I tried to distance myself from what I was studying, the angrier I became. Without my bidding, an undercurrent of alienation also overcame my mental constitution; I began, in the land of my father, Japan, to identify myself more as Filipino.

Encumbered by the collective stories of the JFC and the Philippines and my own personal narrative, riven by identity and migration issues, I felt largely disembowelled and deconstructed. Peace of mind came from teachers, friends and the JFC I encountered. Several individuals have advised me to write a book through an "I" perspective, in the vein of Rey Ventura's works. Indeed, some researchers often quoted Ventura as saying "*Importante din ang kwento mo.*" (Your story is also

important) The last convincing suggestion came when I met Dr. Randolph S. David in Japan. Sir Randy told me my attempts at objectivity were in fact destroying my own soul. In any case, I decided that the only harmonizing solution was to be objective about my subjectivity and refine my project into a form of non-fiction or literary autoethnography.

It is very hard to enumerate the methodology I used in undertaking this research. I view my one year's stay in Japan not as 365 days of field research, but as a spiritual pilgrimage to track the trajectories of parents of JFC and JFC themselves, and to attempt to create an integrative and harmonizing coherence to the disjunction between the Filipino and Japanese cultures and societies; a divide that I feel has afflicted discourse on this issue. I conducted 16 interviews with mothers and JFCs while visiting them in their homes in Higashiosaka, Okayama Nagoya, Shizuoka, Tokyo and Sendai. I originally wanted to characterize the research trip as an extreme form of participant observation; certain realities in my case keep resisting this naive and easy resolution. I was one of them and yet because of my outrospective gaze, also a stranger at the same time.

I believe that producing research in this manner is significant in lending a voice to people whom I consider to be my brethren and siblings. Although Gayathri Spivak warns intellectuals on the folly of speaking for communities living a marginal experience in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" she nonetheless exhorts them to continue trying to speak for them in her seminar for the 2012 Kyoto Prize. I will try to do this now in the time and space allotted for this paper.

Weeping and Crying in this Valley of Tears: Stories of our Mothers

The trajectory of my work started with the parents. This was in order to provide grounding for the character of JFCs as well as for the shape of their inherited issues. Although parents generally aim to insulate their children from the ill winds

of fortune, most JFC are burdened by the abandonment of their fathers, sometimes even by their mothers who leave them with their extended family to continue work in Japan. The poverty that drove their mothers to seek enrichment elsewhere also pains them; many cannot afford to go to college and are instead drafted by their mothers to Japan in order to work and bolster the family's revenue stream. In the case of girls, sometimes the trajectory of their mothers is also their trajectory; one or two JFCs I know work as hostesses in pubs.

In my journey to Japan, I have met women who fit into several different categories: spouses, entertainers, long term residents, rural brides. Originally these Filipinas went to Japan to work, but their assimilation is often established by marriage. Due to the feminist empowerment of women in Japan in the 1970s, some Japanese men had difficulty securing marriage partners. Some rural communities like the sleepy Asahi town in Makiko Wakai's documentary *From Asahi to Abucay* detail the process by which municipalities sought out Filipinas for their unmarried residents. Parreñas also mentions that groups of entertainers use the word "*panalo*," (Tagalog for winner) for an entertainer who is able to marry a Japanese man.

Nora, whom I met in Osaka, came into Japan by way of a marriage agency in Malate. She was originally from one of the smaller islands in the Visayas and her community is so far removed from civilization that it still does not have electricity to this day. In the 1980s, she worked as a secretary in Manila after graduating from a clerical course. One day she was approached by an old woman who charmed her and invited her to the marriage agency the old woman was working for in Malate. She went there on a weekend when three Japanese men were choosing brides. According to her estimate, as many as 100 women queued up for this opportunity. She said that though she felt she was not the prettiest in the line up, one of the men chose her as his bride. She said that the realization dawned on her that she had signed her life away after she penned the contract provided by the old woman.

In Nara, I met Ms. Dina Guerrero, the mother of Taro, a JFC I had met before in the Philippines. The mother and son in tandem had found an organization which processed their papers and provided capital for them to migrate to Japan. Dina and Taro now work as caregivers in *rojin* homes in the city. According to Dina, prior to settling in Japan for good, she worked as a *tarento* in various pubs across 16 prefectures in Japan from the late 1980s up to the early 2000s. Unlike other entertainers, Dina was fiercely protective of her body and once beat up a customer while using her shoe after his wayward hand touched her chest and pinched her buttocks.

Aside from these two women I also met Maria Christina who works alongside Dina in the same caregiver company and Velma, an English teacher in Sendai. Maria Christina was a band vocalist in the 1980s. When opportunity knocked in the form of a job in an entertainment live band club in Namba, Osaka, she took the chance and performed nightly as a singer. This was where she met Hoshino who would become the father of her daughter Miriam. Maria Christina is a Christian and exemplifies the virtues of being one as much as she can. She differentiates herself from other *tarento* on the fact that she had the requisite talent and an appropriate job when she entered Japan, disassociating her line of work from those which require “intimate labor.” Velma on the other hand, used to be a *tarento* but only used the work as a gateway to becoming an English teacher and wife to Japanese man Mizutaka and mother to their daughters Izumi and Mayumi.

By talking to, interacting with and observing the lives of these four Filipina women and so many others who carve their own quiet spaces of strength in Japan, I have marveled at the manifold strategies they have used to not only survive but thrive. The current labor-scape of Filipinas in Japan is changing; former entertainers are quietly filling in positions as care-workers in a graying society. [Lopez 2012]. Filipinas are able leverage their kinship and affective connections with Japanese men into capital and through the acquisition of land and residential assets,

change the landscape of their home cities in the Philippines. [Faier 2012]

Our Japanese Fathers; Invisible Lords in Invisible Fortresses

Although I find that I have been moderately successful in capturing the stories of our mothers, I encountered hindrances in seeking out Japanese fathers, except for a man in Fukushima and one from Nagoya. For the purpose of showing the character of our Japanese fathers, I was forced to use mainly second-hand sources like anthropological treatises and details about them from the accounts of JFC on their fathers. What we have is a portrait, an incomplete mosaic taken from eclectic materials at opposite ends of the spectrum. This is not the kind of overriding grand portrait that I myself desire, but something that hints at the lingering humanity of men between two poles of regard.

I have studied some anthropological treatises on the Japanese with a wary eye, since a few of these writings serve as materials for propaganda about Japanese racial purity. [Befu 2001] Some code words like *bonne/tatemae* (outward appearance/inside emotions) and *uchi/soto* (home/outside) [Hendry 1987] contextualized my impression of the high levels of Japanese self-restraint. In my own thoughts, I believe that dichotomies between externalities and internalities like these serve as loci to foist harmony among members of Japanese society. The individual Japanese sacrifices her/his selfhood for intergroup harmony; in return, Japanese society protects the individual through the institution of gazing away in times of vulnerability. This principle is in effect through the appropriated term *puraihashii* (privacy). [West 2006, 68]. Because of the value placed on privacy in Japan, when a detail that causes embarrassment surfaces, it is often considered polite and respectful to look away.

Unfortunately, JFC, a majority of whom are unacknowledged, can be a source of embarrassment. There are accounts of JFC tracing the homes of their fathers only to be refused at the door. Take for example, the story of the 22-year-old “*Japino*”

by Hiroshi Matsubara in the article *International Marriage: Japanese Filipino Fathers* published by the *Asahi Shimbun*. The young man visited his father in Gunma only to be told: “I don’t want to have anything to do with you.” [Matsubara, 2012].

Other accounts by JFC of their fathers do not inspire much sympathy for these men. Akira, a 20-something male JFC I met in Tokyo described his father as a “damaged person.” According to Akira, his father stayed with them in the Philippines after he opted for early retirement from working life in Japan. He often kept to himself in the bedroom because he was ill. Based on the details that Akira provided, I see his father as a trenchant and surly man; he also had some embedded notions of Japaneseness which he expected to manifest in his children. One time, he told Akira: “It’s your fault that you’re not Japanese,” - a line that haunts Akira even up to now, long after Mr. Kimura’s death. Elisha Kumamoto, a JFC and office lady from Nagoya, calls her father Mr. Kumamoto — never *Oto-san* or *Chichi*. This is connected to a resentment that arose after Elisha found out from her mother that Mr. Kumamoto wanted her aborted when she was still in the womb.

There is some rigidity in the notions and positions of the fathers I’ve mentioned. Even as they invoke certain cultural constructs, like in Akira’s father, or patriarchal privilege in deciding whether a child be born as in Elisha’s Mr. Kumamoto, there is a quality of facileness and contraction that seems to cage them and cuts possible familial and warm affective connections.

Take the story of Maria Christina and her husband Hoshino. According to Maria Christina’s account, she found it hard to relate to her spouse because after coming home, he would remain silent. This is similar to the accounts of several Japanese housewives in the 1980s. They increasingly felt that the men of their households were boarders instead of mates and relatives. [Salamon 1987, 130 - 141]. This is also a root cause of the phenomenon behind the divorce of old Japanese couples; when the men retire, their wives realize that they did not

have a conception of who their husbands are as persons at all, because of all the time they devoted to work and colleagues. [Curry 2007] Hoshino and Maria Christina’s daughter Miriam mentioned that her dad had subscribed to a cellular phone line so that they could communicate. What was supposed to be a modicum of father-daughter connection turned one-sided as Hoshino mostly talked about affairs at work like taxes and files, forgetting that a teenage girl’s experience of the world is fundamentally different from his. There seems to be a disproportion of empathic communication between father and daughter in this case.

Not all Japanese men are created equal. Those who are willing to transgress the constructs of Japanese masculinity can break through and forge satisfying family lives. Examples of such men can be found in Nobue Suzuki’s *Of Love and the Marriage Market, Masculinity politics and Filipina-Japanese Marriages in Japan* and Masaki Sataake’s *At the Core of Filipina-Japanese Marriages*. My supervising professor in Osaka, one of the most eminent Philippinists in Japan, has raised his brood of Japanese-Filipino kids successfully and his relationship with his Filipina wife is still going strong after more than 30 years. During my last months in Japan, working on the request of a JFC in Manila, I went on to search for a father in Fukushima. I was easily able to contact the father thanks to the information provided by the JFC and the help of Velma who worked as my translator. Mr. Takeda and I corresponded for several weeks and it resulted in his wanting to be reunited with his son. It was his own love and desire to be loved by a son he once left behind that enabled this miracle to happen.

When people become human enough to feel that we emit and need to receive love, sometimes it helps people overcome their own limitations.

The JFC: Children of the Pearl, Children of the Sun

What trajectories do the children of these Filipino women and Japanese men take? What paths are open to them?

Although there are peripheral paths for them to take in order to migrate and establish connections with Japan, some of these paths are elitist and challenging, like scholarships, or treacherous and shifty like the supposed “employment opportunities” provided by recruitment firms or recruitment firms posing as NGOs. The best solution is often the legal one, which JFCnet provides. JFCnet is an organization of volunteer lawyers who advocate for JFC rights and represent each one in court. Their process involves searching for the fathers to confirm blood ties; the father is asked for *nin'chi* or acknowledgement, and when the father refuses, JFCnet challenges him to genetic testing.

What supposedly are natural rights of the child to identity and nationality are subject to gate-keeping by Japanese men. Caseworkers in BATIS and Development Action for Women (DAWN), the primary NGOs in the Philippines which tackle issues on JFC, tell stories of mothers who were paid off by the Japanese men who impregnated them to not chase after them for the nationality of their children.

Some JFC in the Philippines get over these hindrances and reach Japan. When they get there, however, they find that inclusion can be problematic. Marshall, a 3rd generation Nikkei-jin I befriended had been refused attendance to Senior High School in Nagoya because he was already beyond 15 years of age when he arrived in Japan. His academic options cut, what kind of career chances does he have? The children I interviewed in Southern Nagoya are having a hard time catching up to the language level of their classmates. One or two are encountering a degree of bullying based on their difference in terms of behavior and physicality.

Even former Peruvian president Alberto Fujimori, a Nikkei born of pure Japanese parents, faced a degree of discrimination and was called “El Chino” as Peruvians were referred to as “chinos” in Japan at the time. [Moorhead, p. 17] In several informal discussions on the topic with foreign residents and academics in Japan, the Japanese expected

Fujimori to talk in Japanese and were shocked when he did not exhibit the linguistic identity expected of him.

The white collar job market is also competitive and demanding; with so many graduates from Japanese universities jostling for positions, is there a place for applicants from foreign universities in third world countries? According to Erika Chino, one of my respondents, she saw a Frenchman cry in the middle of an employment fair due to extreme frustration at not being able to land a job.

Most of the time, I see that JFC from the Philippines fill in the shortfall in manual labor. Akira attended college in the Philippines and majored in psychology before he moved to Tokyo. Even though he has the potential and the capacity for intellectual work, he found that the only opportunities open to him was *gamba* or that of a construction worker. The International Organization for Migration envisioned to put several JFC into suitable white collar jobs. After encountering challenges like the lack of willing companies to invest in assimilating foreign workers, the second phase of the IOM's JFC Multi-Sectoral Networking Project was only able to get two JFC into two companies.

Nobue Suzuki neatly boils down the challenges that JFC face in Japan in *Outlawed Children*, a statement that I feel wholly encapsulates the spirit of the struggle: “Instead, the lack of cultural knowledge, including linguistic knowledge, and social network continue to create difficulties in their lives. They will still need to continue pushing for greater recognition until they secure another set of local, national and global forces to ensure that their citizenships are respected in their fatherless patria.”

Conclusion

In a world where borders are increasingly becoming permeable due to the dictates of globalization, the commingling of ethnic populations can only increase. True enough, according to figures from

Japan's Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, international marriages have risen from a mere 5,546 to 34,393 in 2009. [Yamamoto 2010]. Mixed-heritage populations like the JFC can only rise. Unfortunately societal, cultural, legal, and national institutions in various countries are not ready to help fulfil the needs of mixed-roots children, therefore displacing them into positions of marginality.

Although this is the current picture painted by my findings, I believe that there will be a sea-change in terms of the construction of identities, especially in the region of Southeast Asia and Japan. As of this writing, Japan is processing its membership of the Hague Convention on International Child Abduction after several fathers from the United States and Europe raised the issue of access to their mixed-roots children. In Japan, cultural responsibility of child-rearing is placed on the mothers, a belief which has often resulted in Japanese courts siding with mothers in terms of custody battles. The enforcement of the convention could change ideas about gender roles and parentage over time. Japan's population decline will also likely influence its policy on migrants and children of migrants.

Southeast Asia, on the other hand, may be on the threshold of an era of cross-migration due to the impending economic integration which will result in an intercultural generation of children.

Children bridge current generations to the future. Those with access to different cultures, mixed or otherwise, stand to link countries together. The affective relationships that these individuals can build may be hindered by shifting citizenship and nationality policies of countries - policies that often leverage an interest of the state. Take for example the Philippines, which through its Republic Act No. 9225 of 2005 automatically grants re-acquisition of citizenship after swearing an oath to the flag even if a Filipino had already naturalized in another country. The country has done so in order to allow its expatriates and its overseas workers to maintain connections - connections that often yield investments of these communities to their homeland.

It is my wish that fellow members of the API community take a look at the issues affecting identity in our region in the coming years in order to mitigate the effects of increased cross-migration and help preserve and make existing traditions adaptable to changes. Although the integration could prove to be problematic, the times shall prove to be interesting ones and worthy of reflection and study.

As mixed-roots individuals and migrants chart their own alternate histories to counter-balance those endorsed by states, the perception of identity and its legal definitions shall become unhinged and become more in-flux. The surfacing of new identities is often transgressive, causing anxiety where ideas about identity were thought to be iron-clad. As people migrate, intermarry, travel, and create affective relationships, their notions of identity expand to incorporate cultural elements they like and see.

Though my work with the JFC continues, I am looking forward to a more tightly interconnected Southeast Asia and its future denizens who will interweave identities alongside each other, constructions that are always in progress, at certain points flawed, but closer together as far as humanity is concerned.

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