



Labor Migration and Minority Group Empowerment: The *Nikkeijin* in Davao and their Association

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Abstract

After World War II, Filipino *Nikkeijin* suffered social and economic difficulties. As a result, they tried to conceal their Japanese origin to escape reproaches and teasing. Their shared experience of social discrimination mobilized them into associations that helped them to socially empower themselves. To explore the process of their empowerment, the present study examines the case of Davao *Nikkeijin* and their association, *Philippine Nikkeijin Kai Inc.* (PNJK). Looking at the different dimensions of empowerment, it shows how this association has helped some *Nikkeijin* acquire Japanese nationality and/or migrate to Japan to work there. Nowadays, *Nikkeijin* have good socio-economic status in the Philippines and are not a marginalized minority group anymore.

Starting in the 1980s, the dynamic performance of the Japanese economy has opened various opportunities for Filipinos, notably women, to come and work in Japan as *Overseas Performing Artists* (OPAs). The large number of OPAs entering Japan annually has overshadowed the parallel migration¹ of the so-called *Nikkeijin* (persons of Japanese descent)

from the Philippines. This group is composed of *Nisei* (having one Japanese parent, mostly their fathers), *Sansei* (children of *Nisei*), and even *Yonsei* (children of *Sansei*). Unlike the migration of Filipino women to Japan, that were pejoratively called *Japayuki* for their supposed prostitution (Suzuki 2000, p. 431), the *Nikkeijin*'s migration has acquired more positive connotations, such as return to the original homeland and reacquisition of a somewhat hidden identity. In this case, migration represents a means of social empowerment for such a minority group.

Existing studies on the global movements of people have shown how migration empowers men (Osella and Osella 2000, p. 120-121) and women within and outside of the family unit (Zentgraf 2002, p. 634; Barber 2002, p. 46). However, relatively less examined in this literature are the cases where migrants are minority in sending countries and the various ways they socially empower themselves (among which migration stands out as an ultimate means). The *Nikkeijin* in the Philippines fit in this frame: as they were socially discriminated and marginalized because of their biological link to the former Japanese rulers of the country, they developed a strong group consciousness and solidarity that helped them to improve their socio-economic condition. They fit well Louis Wirth's (1945, p. 347) classic definition of a minority, that is, "a group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination".

In the years following World War II (WWII), there was a strong social stigma attached to children born of Filipino-Japanese couples in the Philippines, due to the Japanese exactions during their occupation of the country. According to Kawai Hiroyuki (2005, p. 97), "during the postwar days, [...] all left-behind *Nisei* in the Philippines, becoming target of scorn and hostility as they were called children of the Japanese assailants, were forced to live amid poverty and discriminations"². Even during the war, these children and their Filipino mothers had lived in constant fear because of the guerillas' death threats (Fresnoza 2003a). Luisa Mabunay's

study (1979) reveals the postwar sufferings of *Nikkeijin* and their strategies of hiding their identities to prevent reprisals from their town mates. *Nisei*, for instance, used their Filipino mothers' surnames instead of their Japanese fathers'. However, in many cases, their efforts to conceal their biological origin seemed futile, as their physical appearance and their family history known in their village and/or town betrayed them (Fresnoza 2003b). In his study of Davao *Nikkeijin*, Ohno Shun (1992, p. 1) explains that their experiences of discrimination and early exposure to Japanese culture drew second-generation Filipino-Japanese closer to the Japanese side than to the Filipino one in terms of identity consciousness. There are no statistics concerning how many of these *Nisei* experienced verbal or physical attacks due to their Japanese ancestry, but studies have shown that discriminatory actions as well as confiscation of their family properties took place almost systematically throughout the country (Ohno 1992; Ohno 2007; Kawai 2005; Fresnoza 2003a). The plight of these *Nisei* became known to the public in the 1980s, as the local anti-Japanese sentiment subsided alongside Japan's economic boom, with Japan's Official Development Assistance pouring over the Philippines, and with the Philippine government's promotion of its labor-export program as a solution to its economic problems. During this time also, *Nisei* started to mobilize and communicate their needs and concerns to the Japanese government through associations they had founded, Japanese citizen groups, the Japanese consulate office in Davao, and the Japanese embassy in Manila. Japan's economic progress and migration policies during this period gave them the possibility of migrating to the land of their forefathers, and eventually of improving their socio-economic position in the Philippines. Nowadays, Filipino *Nikkeijin* are estimated to be around 50,000 (Okushima 2005, p. 39), mainly in the province of Davao where, before the outbreak of WWII, a large Japanese immigrant population was found: more than 12,592 in 1930, representing approximately 64 percent of the total population of Davao at that time, and about 20,000 in 1941 (Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs Trade Bureau 1930; Furiya 1993, p. 155).

The labor migration of Filipino *Nikkeijin* to Japan has had a big impact on the socio-economic status of their families left behind in the Philippines. Being legally recognized as Japanese descendants by the Japanese government, they and their children as well as grandchildren are enabled to work in Japan as a way to accumulate economic and symbolic capital. Their migration started as temporary, but *Nikkeijin* migrants now tend to prolong their stay in Japan as they receive long-term residence permits. Their actual migration to Japan would not have been possible without the assistance of *Nikkeijin* associations that have contributed to their eventual empowerment in Philippine society. How have these associations empowered them as a minority group? What are the *Nikkeijin*'s strategies of self-empowerment? How do they sustain and reaffirm their recently acquired "positive" social status? To find out the answers to these questions, the present article examines the process of social empowerment of the *Nikkeijin* in the Philippines, specifically those in Davao.

The data presented in this paper is mainly based on the unpublished results of a qualitative research I conducted in 1999 with five *Nisei* who were among the first Filipino-Japanese descendants to receive Japanese nationality and with the persons-in-charge of the *Philippine Nikkeijin Kai Inc. (PNJK)* in Davao, an organization established to serve the interest of *Nikkeijin* in this province. All the *Nisei* interviewed (2 men and 3 women) were married, had both Japanese and Filipino names, and ranged in age from 60 to 76 years old. These results were complemented with recent data on *Nikkeijin* and with historical data gathered during my three-year research in Japan on the migration of Okinawan people to the Philippines. Before exploring the case of the Davao *Nikkeijin*, I first take a closer look at the existing literature on minority groups, specifically their strategies of self-empowerment. I then present my theoretical tool of analysis followed by a historical discussion of the Japanese immigration to the Philippines before WWII. The final section of the paper delves into the issues revolving around the Filipino *Nikkeijin*'s migration to Japan, its implications on their social class status and identity.

Self-empowerment of minority groups

The definition of a minority group vis-à-vis a majority group in society is not based on numerical quantity, but rather on the existence of a differential treatment characterized by discrimination and most often social segregation. Such treatment stems from perceived, supposed or imagined physical, cultural and biological differences often reinforced by a history of either migration and colonization, or war and independence, as in the case of *Nikkeijin* in the Philippines. The experience of social discrimination has motivated minority groups in different societies to adopt strategies of resistance such as political participation, establishment of various associations, investment in education, engagement in different economic activities, and of course migration itself.

For some minority groups, the avenue of resistance and social empowerment comes first from active political participation. Political empowerment, as Lawrence Bobo and Franklin Gilliam (1990, p. 378) explain, is “the extent to which a group has achieved a significant representation and influence in political decision making”. In the United States, for instance, social mobility and empowerment of African-Americans in urban areas arose from their strong involvement in local politics (Gilliam 1996, p. 60). This also applies to women, who are considered socially marginalized when compared to their male counterparts due to their general ascribed status of “female” and to their special ascribed status of “wife”, “mother”, and “sister” (Hacker 1951, p. 62). Aside from their increasing direct involvement into politics, women and other minority groups also tend to rely on their own founded associations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to change the local political atmosphere into one that favors social and gender equality. Political lobbying through such bodies represents one of the ways of “romancing the state” (Stromquist 1995a, p. 451) to uplift their interest often overshadowed by those of the majority population. The African-American civil rights movements in the 1960s and the women movements in the 1960s and 1970s are some of the examples of minority groups’ collective

mobilization towards self-empowerment. In these cases, empowerment is understood as a collective social and political action that engenders change and transformation of the status quo.

In the context of migration, empowerment of an immigrant population in a receiving society often takes the form of entrepreneurship. Engagement into the so-called “ethnic business” is seen as a form of immigrant social incorporation. The structuralist-materialist approach to immigrant entrepreneurship interprets the emergence of ethnic business as an answer to the social discrimination experienced by immigrants that limits their chances in the labor market (see for instance the study of Basu and Werbner 2001). It is also a strategy of social class mobility, as observed in the Cuban ethnic enclave economy in Miami where entrepreneurship appears to be a sort of symbolic capital (Portes and Jensen 1989, p. 945-947). Investing morally and economically in children’s education represents another strategy of social empowerment employed by most immigrant populations in both receiving and sending countries; it is seen by migrants as a key towards upward social mobility (Pessar 1984, p. 1197; Waters 2005, p. 369-370; Waters 2006, p. 188-189).

Remittances represent another way for migrants to improve their social status and eventually their influence in their country of origin. As Pauline Gardener Barber (2002, p. 43) points out in her study of Filipina migrant workers, “migrants are important ‘behind the scene’ actors in shifts in livelihood and class and cultural practices in their Philippine and overseas communities”. Studies on migrant remittances have shown the importance of money sent from abroad for sustaining the basic needs of a migrant’s household and the social reproduction of the family. Remittances also boost the value of local currencies and can help stabilize the economy of the migrants’ countries of origin. In the case of women migrants, migration and work abroad can represent a source of self-empowerment as it brings improved social status and power in the domestic and public spheres and increased personal freedom (Zentgraf 2002, p. 637-638; Mozère 2005, p. 187-190). However, when it comes to migrants’ rights and protection,

non-migrant and migrant NGOs are indispensable as a medium of expression and as a source of information in both the receiving and sending countries. Migrant NGOs' transnational networking has been playing an important role in migrant empowerment as they have made "the needs and rights of globalized workers more broadly recognized and ultimately attended to" (Ball and Piper 2002, p. 1030). Nevertheless, empowerment may have different objectives depending on the categories of the migrants themselves and the nature of their migration (Piper 2004, p. 226). Migration may empower or disempower migrants depending on the social context; but when it comes to a marginalized group, the act of migrating is more likely to be considered as a form of empowerment holding promise of economic and symbolic capital accumulation. This applies to the *Nikkeijin* population in the Philippines, which for many years experienced social indifference and economic difficulties.

Taking into account the different strategies of self-empowerment adopted by migrants both "here" and "there" as well as by other minority groups in society, empowerment appears to be a socio-political process that reveals the articulation between human agency and social structure. Nelly Stromquist (2002, p. 23) suggests that empowerment, as a social process, presents four dimensions enabling a minority group to act for their interest: cognitive, psychological, political, and economic. The cognitive dimension involves a critical understanding of one's situation of subordination and requires knowledge of one's legal rights, while the psychological dimension refers to the feelings of self-confidence and self-esteem to do something that could change one's condition (Stromquist 1995b, p. 14). Concerning the political dimension, it "entails the ability to analyze the surrounding in political and social terms; it also means the ability to organize and mobilize for social change" (p. 15). To strengthen the psychological and political dimensions, economic resources are an important factor, notably "the capacity to generate independent income" (p. 15). These four dimensions are pertinent in the examination of the process of self-empowerment of the Davao *Nikkeijin*, a socially and self-identified minority group. Their present social status has passed through

different phases of development, which cannot be solely attributed to the possibility of migrating and working in Japan: as we will see later, the Philippine and Japanese governments as well as NGOs have played a role in identifying and in promoting the rights of this minority group.

Japanese pre-war immigration to the Philippines

The massive Japanese immigration to the Philippines took place in the early part of the twentieth century as a response to the labor demands in the latter country and to the Japanese government's promotion of overseas migration as a solution to Japan's overpopulation and unemployment problems. It later became self-sustaining as migrants extended their stay and established social networks. The migration policies of both Japan and the US colonial Philippines facilitated such migration, which contributed to the economic dynamism of Japan, the Philippines and the United States. Policies of other countries (as shown below) that were unfavorable to Japanese immigration also exerted influence on the influx of Japanese nationals to the Philippines. This early period of the twentieth century is known as the "golden age of Japanese immigration" (Fresnoza 2003b, p. 27).

Japanese movements to the Philippines date back to a much earlier era, however, predating even the founding of the city of Manila in 1570 (Iwao 1943, p. 1). The earliest known Japanese migrants in the South sea region were fishermen, traders, domestic servants and sailors, and later established *nihon machi* or Japanese communities in Manila (see Foreign Service Institute 1998). After two centuries and a half, Meiji Japan sent trade missions to the Spanish-governed Philippines in order to improve their trading relations: these were the Kawakita and Minami missions. The 1886 Minami Teisuke mission noted a scarcity of native laborers in sugar and tobacco plantations that opened many possibilities for Japanese immigrants to work in agriculture. This observation led to the establishment in 1888 of the first Japanese consulate in Manila. The main mission of this consulate was to promote trade with the Philippines and to continue

exploring the prospect of sending Japanese migrants (Yu-Jose 1998, p. 280).

Attempts to encourage migration to the Philippines in the latter part of the 1880s were unsuccessful. During the first year of operation of the Japanese consulate, there were only 35 Japanese migrants in the Philippines, comprising four diplomats temporarily assigned, four businessmen, 12 clergymen and 15 sailors (see Sato 1994; Arakaki 1987). To recruit more migrants, the Japanese government created in 1891 an Emigration Bureau in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and promulgated an “emigration protection law” in four parts: the ordinance of 1894, the law of 1896, the regulations of 1907 and 1909, and the rules of 1907 (see Moriyama 1985). Private emigration companies (*imin gaisha*) also participated in encouraging migration to the Philippines, starting with the creation in December 1891 of the *Nihon Yoshisa Imin Goumei Kaisha* (see “Imin Gaisha” 1983, p. 238-239). In 1917, the Japanese government consolidated all emigration companies into one big company called the *Kaigai Kougyou Kabushiki Gaisha* (Overseas Development Corporation) to systematize and centralize the recruitment and management of migrants.

The first massive inflow of Japanese migrants to the Philippine started in 1899, one year after the start of the American occupation of the country. This migration resulted from an increased labor demand in the Philippines as the American colonial government embarked in infrastructure development projects (e.g., construction of asphalt roads, railroads, bridges, ports, and even military barracks). One of the famous projects was the Benguet Road (Kennon Road) construction in Baguio, a city located in the northern highlands (see Kanashiro 1995). The Filipino and Chinese laborers hired to work for this project could not stand the rigors of the mountain climate, so the American colonial government resorted to the importation of workers from Japan and other countries to fill the need for efficient labor. After the completion of the Benguet Road in 1905, many Japanese laborers stayed in the Philippines: around 500 of them remained in Baguio, and some of them developed highly successful farms and

nurseries in the fertile Trinidad Valley (Goodman 1967a). Other Japanese laborers went to Manila where they worked as artisans, cabinetmakers, carpenters, and in enterprises that needed skilled labor. A small number of laborers worked as minor construction workers at Fort McKinley in Makati and at Camp Overton in Lanao in Mindanao. Many Japanese migrants proceeded to Davao to work in hemp plantations.

Another factor that stimulated the Japanese movement to the Philippines was the prohibition of Japanese labor migration to Hawaii (as a result of the Gentlemen's Agreement in 1908 allowing only the family reunification or immigration of those who had already relatives in the United States), then to many other countries (e.g., Canada in 1908, Australia in 1909 and the United States in 1924). This encouraged Japanese to proceed to countries such as the Philippines that had less strict immigration policies. Later, the Jones Act of 1916 increased Philippine autonomy and granted the country the right to make its own immigration laws (to be approved by the President of the United States); moreover, the Lansing-Ishii agreement of 1917 signed between Japan and the United States to settle their disputes over China also facilitated Japanese immigration to the Philippines and indirectly inspired Japanese to go there by generating amicable Japanese-American relations. In fact, Japanese immigration was not regulated in the Philippines until 1940 when President Manuel L. Quezon approved the Commonwealth Act No. 473, also known as the Immigration Act, establishing an annual quota of 500 Japanese entrants into the country.

Sharp increases in the number of Japanese immigrants in the Philippines were observed during the abaca industry boom, at times of economic depression in Japan and other countries, and at the outbreaks of the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1905), Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), and World War I (1914-1917). From 1907 to 1917, the Philippines had the highest concentration of Japanese migrants among today's Southeast Asian countries (see Yu-Jose 1996). In 1929, there were 4,535 Japanese in the Philippines; by 1939, their number reached about 29,000, exceeding

for the first time in Philippine history that of the Chinese immigrants (Yu-Jose 1992, p. 126). During this period of massive Japanese immigration, some Filipinos developed antagonistic feelings toward the Japanese migrants due to their refusal to adopt Christianity and due to their practices of importing Japanese brides. Despite these antagonistic sentiments, the Philippines continued to show receptivity to Japanese migrants, whose economic activities created employment opportunities for Filipinos and stabilized the Philippine economy (Suzuki and Fresnoza 2004, p. 260).

***Davaokuo*: the Japanese migrant community in Davao**

Japanese settlement in the Davao area developed as a result of the coincidence of three factors: a) the need for hardy and industrious laborers to work in the abaca (hemp) plantations; b) the presence of unemployed Japanese in the Philippines who had originally been employed in northern Luzon by the American builders of the Benguet or Kennon Road; and c) the foresighted enterprise of Ota Kyosaburo (Goodman 1967b, p. 1).

Many Japanese workers employed for the construction of the Kennon Road decided to move to Davao afterwards. Matsuda Nagasuke, Ota Kyosaburo (who later pioneered as a leading plantation owner in Davao), and Oshiro Takazo assisted them. In 1903, Juan Awad, the Libanese manager of an abaca plantation in Lapanday, hired the first group of Japanese workers recruited in Manila by Matsuda (*Facets of Davao History* 1997, p. 71). In September 1904, Ota sent 180 Japanese laborers to Davao, and in 1905, he and Oshiro worked together in transferring from Benguet a second batch of about 170 workers. Davao historian Ernesto I. Corcino (1998, p. 85) describes the way the local population reacted to these migrants as follows:

The initial contact with the new breed of workers in white kimono sporting long hair was a curiosity to Davaoños. Their habit of bathing naked unashamed, however, elicited some kind of protest and this was corrected by admonishing them to construct walls for privacy in their bathing places. For their performance in assigned tasks, their

employer had no reason to complain. They were uncomplaining, dedicated and fast workers. Thus despite differences in cultural outlook and manners, the other planters interposed no objections to the bringing in of more Japanese laborers to Davao.

In 1907, Ota and Oshiro established Ota Development Company with the former as president and the latter vice-president. The success of this company stimulated the investment of new capital from Japan in the Davao region and the formation of a number of other Japanese-sponsored plantation corporations (Goodman 1967b, p. 3). By 1930s, there were 43 Japanese-owned agricultural corporations in Davao with a total investment of 20 million pesos; about 2,000 independent tenants with a total capital of ten million pesos; about 200 commercial and industrial enterprises with a total investment of five million pesos; and some investments in lumbering and fishing (Yu-Jose 1992, p. 67). By 1935, there were 307 Japanese-owned retail stores in Davao, servicing a Japanese population of 13,065. This large Japanese migrant population in Davao began to look like a transplanted Japan, popularly called *Davaokuo*, after *Manchukuo* (a state established in Manchuria and part of Mongolia by Japan in 1932 with a strong Japanese immigrant population). To meet the needs of this expanding community, Japanese migrants established schools for their children, and recreation centers, hospitals and ports for both Japanese and Filipino residents of Davao. Moreover, Japanese migrants began to accumulate large tracks of land, and many of those pioneer Japanese laborers became independent landowners, business proprietors, plantation officials or managers.

Various stories have been told in private about how the Japanese migrants were able to acquire the most fertile tracks of land through dummies, marriages with native women and suspicious arrangements with Filipino landowners (*Facets of Davao History* 1997, p. 66). The mother of three of the five *Nisei* interviewed for the present study were tribal women, and one explained that the Japanese married these women as a form of defense against the tribe's anger. This anger can be traced to the

fact that many tribesmen had lost some of their lands to Japanese migrants due to their ignorance of the existing land laws at that time. The expansion of Japanese landholdings caught the attention of the Davaoños. Consequently, local politicians became alarmed about the concept of *Davaokuo* and they brought to the attention of national leaders the problems of the Japanese landholdings in Davao. To address this problem, President Quezon established areas reserved for Filipino settlers.

The migration of Japanese to the Philippines and their economic activities in the country were interrupted when Japan occupied it in 1942 following the Pearl Harbor bombing³ in December 1941. This occupation lasted for three years, during which a puppet government was established under President Jose P. Laurel. The 60-mile “death march” of about 78,000 Filipino and American prisoners of war from Bataan to Pampanga marked the beginning of Japanese occupation of the country. Due to the confiscation of different means of transportation and farm outputs, the agricultural productivity of the country decreased and food became scarce (Agoncillo 1969, p. 236). There were many exactions, including forced labor, rapes and sexual slavery imposed on “comfort women” (see Tanaka 2002, p. 47-52). During this period, out of fear of punishment and death, the Japanese residents of Davao participated in the war effort to demonstrate their loyalty, especially Okinawans, who were considered “inferiors” by the Japanese forces, and those married to Filipino women (see Hayase 1999). Some young Filipino-Japanese (including my five *Nisei* informants) also joined the Japanese military as soldiers, paramilitary personnel or civilian employees (Nishida 1995, p. 3; Ohno 2007, p. 247).

The arrival of General McArthur’s liberation forces in 1944 put an end to the Japanese occupation of the country: Japan surrendered to the Allied Powers in 1945, and as a result, “thousands of overseas Japanese from the former colonies and conquered territories, including the Philippines were repatriated” (Mabunay 1979, p. 114), including *Nisei* aged 16 and above. Younger children of Japanese-Filipino marriages were left in the country. For Filipinos, these second-generation Japanese

descendants became constant reminders of the massive Japanese immigration that preceded the war and of the Japanese military exactions during their occupation of the country. Consequently, during the post-war years, *Nisei* were being teased and called “anak ng hapon” (child of Japanese) or “hapon” (Japanese), names that carried negative connotations such as brutality and cruelty. They suffered economically and emotionally as “they had their assets confiscated, and faced the slaughter of their friends and relatives, persecution and discrimination” (Nishida 1995, p. 3; see also Fresnoza 2003a; Ohno 1992, p. 72-73). They lived at the margin of the Philippine society due to the stigma attached to their biological background, and for some to their physical appearance and distinctive manners of behavior.

Gambarou!* Individual and collective empowerment of Davao *Nikkeijin

Collective awareness of their disadvantageous social status and common experience of socio-economic difficulties united the *Nisei* even before Japan opened its door to *Nikkeijin* workers around the world. The founding of PNJK in 1979 showcases the Davao *Nikkeijin*'s collective effort to promote their common interest. The process of group empowerment concerning Davao *Nikkeijin* reflects the interaction of various factors at different levels from individual to group. Within these levels, we can observe the articulation of the earlier-mentioned four components of empowerment as proposed by Stromquist (1995b). In what follows, I illustrate these four components: firstly cognitive and psychological, secondly political, and thirdly economic dimensions.

Cognitive and psychological dimensions of *Nikkeijin*'s empowerment

What stimulated the Davao Filipino-Japanese descendants to advance their interests and mobilize into associations did not come from inside

their group but from outside. It was the moral support they received, either from a Japan-based association or from individuals, that inspired *Nikkeijin* to organize associations and reinforce their Japanese identity.

Among the five informants' Japanese fathers, three were abaca plantation workers, one taught Japanese, and another one drove a taxi. One of our informants, Roberto⁴, could hardly narrate any story regarding his Japanese father because his Filipino mother did not tell him anything about him except his occupation. All respondents, however, remembered their abundant and comfortable life that was abruptly destroyed upon the outbreak of the war.

During the war, the interviewees collaborated with the Japanese forces: Carmen served as a nurse aid and the others as dressmakers in a Japanese camp. When the war ended, four interviewees' fathers were repatriated to Japan whereas the fifth one died of disease in the Philippines. All interviewees knew easily why they were being looked down in their villages: their biological link to the ex-rulers and their collaboration with them during the war. This made their life miserable and they lost their self-confidence to assert their real identity as Filipino-Japanese children. Instead of nurturing the richness of their double origin, they employed various strategies to reinforce their Filipino identity and to conceal or suppress the Japanese one as a way to escape social reproaching: Celia and Roberto changed their Japanese surnames to Filipino, Maria and her family stopped using Japanese as family's medium of communication, and Carmen was forced by her family to marry a Filipino, so as to acquire a non-Japanese surname. At the time of the interview, all the respondents could still speak Japanese, but only three of them fluently.

Due to the confiscation of their family properties and to the social barrier they were facing, none of the respondents was able to obtain university education and only one of them finished secondary schooling. Three took up vocational courses despite their lack of high school diploma. Jirou and Roberto engaged in farming while Celia, Maria and Carmen became unemployed housewives. Despite the discrimination and poverty

they experienced, four respondents' families did not try to go to Japan: only Maria's family tried to follow her repatriated father, but failed in the process. All of the respondents confided that they did not receive any financial help from their Japanese relatives at times when they needed assistance. For many years, these respondents kept silent concerning their Japanese background, and only started to talk about it openly when they learnt about the existence of a *Nikkeijin* association in Davao – the PNJK.

Hence, the courage to finally come out of the public and be open about their Japanese background only became possible for Davao *Nisei* after finding existing structures that would back-up their interest as a minority group. As Nelly Stromquist (1995b, p. 15) argues, "one cannot teach self-confidence and self-esteem; one must provide the conditions in which these can develop". Similarly, the *Baguio Nikkeijin Kai* was founded in 1972 through the efforts of a Japanese Roman Catholic nun, Sister Tokoyo Unno from Shizuoka Prefecture, who encouraged *Nikkeijin* in northern Luzon to surface (Kawai 2005, p. 53). The strong anti-Japanese sentiment among the majority Filipino population probably explains why these *Nikkeijin* did not mobilize on their own initiative: Filipino *Nikkeijin* tried as much as possible to remain somewhat socially invisible in order to avoid direct confrontation with the majority group.

The courage of Filipino *Nikkeijin* to come out and be socially heard intensified in the 1980s, when Japan was at the peak of its economic development and rapidly starting to attract migrant workers from different countries in the world. During the same period, the Philippines was undergoing major political transformation and economic stagnation. As a result, the migratory wave of people became reversed: the Philippines became a country of emigration, and Japan a country of immigration for Filipinos and other foreign workers. Starting in the 1970s, Japanese war memorial pilgrimages to the Philippines in search of wartime graves resulted in the "discovery" of the plight of Filipino *Nikkeijin*. These visits raised public attention on the children born of Japanese and Filipino parents before the outbreak of the Pacific War. After two decades, in 1995, 1997 and

2004, the Japanese government, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and in cooperation with the Philippine government, conducted a series of national investigations on the situation of these Filipino *Nikkeijin*. The Embassy of Japan in Manila opened a “*Nikkeijin’s desk*” after the 1997 survey in order to “fast-track the screening process for *Nikkeijin* applicants” who needed visa to go to Japan (Ohno 2007, p. 252). This government’s intervention gave the “go” signal to *Nisei* as well as to their children and grandchildren to assert and reinforce their hidden Japanese identity.

Filipino *Nikkeijin* associations throughout the country assisted the conduct of the 1995 and 1997 surveys that were financially supported by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. During the 1995 survey, 919 of the 2,125 people registered (1,054 men and 1,071 women) were Davao *Nisei* (Kawai 2005, p. 60). Considering that the survey was carried out in only a few regions, this figure is likely an underestimate, and the total number of Filipino *Nikkeijin*, including *Sansei* and *Yonsei*, could have been somewhere between 60,000 and 70,000 (*ibid.*, p. 64).

Kawai Hiroyuki explains that during the second national survey in 1997, all the registered *Nisei* were classified into three categories based on whether their names appeared in the family register (*kosekitohon*⁵) of their Japanese parent or not: Category A were those whose names appeared in the family register, Category B were those whose Japanese ancestor’s family register was found but did not bear their own names, whereas Category C were those whose ancestor’s *kosekitohon* was not located (*ibid.*, p. 66). According to Kawai’s research, 1,015 *Nisei*’s Japanese nationality was confirmed at the end of this survey. Regarding the third survey in 2004, Kawai explains that Japan’s Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs) played a crucial role in the investigation and data collection about the Japanese background of 1,099 Category C *Nisei* (*ibid.*). Japanese civilian volunteers searched for the names and the permanent address of these *Nisei*’s Japanese parents in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs diplomatic archive, notably in the documents concerning passport issuance (*ibid.*). Finding the home address of the *Issei* parents meant finding the location of the family register where the Filipino *Nisei*’s names were possibly registered.

In 2003, a non-profit organization called *Philippine Nikkei-jin Legal Support Center* (PNLSC) was founded in Tokyo to provide *Nikkeijin* with legal and social assistance. The services it offers are as follows: a) “tracing Japanese ancestors to recover identity of *Nikkei-jin*”; b) “filing petitions with family courts for permission to create a family registry of *Nikkei-jin*”; c) “assisting *Nikkeijin* legally by providing necessary information and services”; d) “disseminating information on *Nikkei-jin* through newsletter, website and blog”; and e) “strengthening the network of Philippine *Nikkei-jin* in Japan and *Nikkei-jin* Organizations in the Philippines”⁶. The establishment of the PNLSC by Japanese shows a growing interest for Philippine *Nikkeijin* in Japan. As Rochelle Ball and Nicola Piper (2002, p. 1028) explain:

States have an important place in citizenship struggles and remain the central actors in the enactment and implementation of any progressive policies, but in the absence of a political will to do so, civic or NGO activism is required to target states.

At this moment, PNLSC has received support from Nippon Foundation in carrying out its project of family register restoration of 500 Filipino *Nikkeijin* over a period of three years. One of the PNLSC’s effective strategies is to invoke the 1997 Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) of the Philippines in order for undocumented marriages of tribal women, or rarely men, to Japanese migrants to be recognized⁷, allowing Filipinos of Japanese ancestry whose parents were married through tribal rites to apply for Japanese citizenship.

Overall, the cooperation of the Philippine and Japanese governments, *Nikkeijin* associations, and Japanese NGOs/ NPOs has contributed to the rise of public awareness on the *Nikkeijin*’s difficult social situations, which in turn has boosted the self-esteem of the *Nisei* to finally assert themselves in the society. What is evident is that non-state actors have played a significant role in making *Nikkeijin*’s emigration to Japan possible. As the search for the past continues, Filipino *Nikkeijin*’s

associations play a central role in doing so, while championing the rights of their members who for a long period were socially neglected.

The PNJK as an avenue of political empowerment

Since the beginning of the 1980s, the voice of *Nikkeijin* in Davao has been well heard through the PNJK. Through many years of rallying for the cause of these war-displaced people, this association has inspired other *Nikkeijin* groups and organizations throughout the country to strive harder. This section reviews the political dimension of the Philippine *Nikkeijin*'s empowerment by focusing on the role of the PNJK.

In 1969, Davao *Nisei* established the *Nisei Kai* with the support of the Japan-based *Aidakai* (association of love for Davao) initiated by Japanese migrant returnees. The *Nisei Kai* was reorganized in 1979 as the PNJK, with Hagio Yukitoshi as its first president. However, its official operation began only on August 14, 1980 after it was registered in the Security and Exchange Commission (Interview with Benigno Tutor, Sr., 18 February 1999). Its establishment owes largely to Minamoto Keizo, an evangelical minister of the *Sekai Kyusei Kyo* (religion for the salvation of the world), and to a group of *Nisei* led by Rodolfo Tutor, Sr., president of the PNJK at the time of the interview in 1999. The PNJK has been aiming to elevate the socio-economic status of *Nikkeijin*, to bring them back to the mainstream of society, and to establish a well-organized Japanese descendants' community in Davao. Its initial activities included awarding grants to deserving teachers to go to Japan to study Japanese, as well as participating in the annual convention of overseas Japanese sponsored by the Japanese government. The PNJK's basic education scholarship program began in 1981, especially targeting young teachers, whereas the first batch of PNJK representatives to the convention was sent to Japan in 1982. In 1992, the PNJK discontinued its annual participation in the said gathering after finding out that its representatives were not registered in the convention's record book, and thus were not allowed to participate in the event.

Following this unpleasant experience, PNJK members decided to focus on sending teachers to Japan who would later teach Japanese voluntarily at the PNJK educational center. At the beginning, the PNJK offered Japanese classes exclusively for *Nikkeijin* who would migrate to and work in Japan. In 1992, it opened a nursery and kindergarten program with a 30-minute free Japanese class. Moreover, in order to communicate effectively with other *Nikkeijin* in other parts of the country, PNJK officials traveled throughout the country and encouraged *Nikkeijin* associations to join them in establishing a national federation of Filipino-Japanese descendants. The first national convention attended by *Nikkeijin* associations' representatives was held in Davao City on June 12, 1992 and resulted in the creation of the *Federation of Nikkeijin Kai Philippines Incorporated* (FNJKP) with Rodolfo Tutor, Sr. as president. As of today, the federation consists of 17 branches. The Davao chapter is the biggest one, with a membership of over 6,000 (JETRO 2008, p. 1), and serves as coordinating center for the other Mindanao chapters. As of 1999, the federation had more than 30,000 members. Currently, Carlos B. Teraoka, honorary consul-general of the Japanese embassy in Manila, acts as the present chairman of the federation.

The *Nikkeijin Kai* federation has been commissioned by the Japanese government to conduct investigation and research on *Nikkeijin*. The federation has also been helping *Nikkeijin* to apply for recognition, citizenship, and decent jobs in Japan. After locating *Nikkeijin* in the country, it has assisted them in verifying their records in Japan and in applying for Japanese nationality. Furukawa Shiromi, president of *Kigyō Kyōgi Kai*, a Japanese NGO of company owners, and Toyoguchi Osamu, vice-president, initiated this program that is open to *Nisei*, *Sansei* and *Yonsei*. Program applicants are categorized into A (those whose names appear in their Japanese parent's family register in Japan) and B (those who do not, mostly *Sansei* and *Yonsei*). In Japan, a human rights lawyer from a group of Japanese volunteer lawyers provides free legal assistance to the *Nikkeijin* program applicants. This program started in 1990 when the revised Japanese Immigration Control Law was implemented. The new law has offered *Nikkeijin* around the world,

specifically *Nisei* and *Sansei*; the possibility to migrate to Japan, to take up any kinds of jobs (skilled, semi- or unskilled) they like, to apply for a long-term resident visa of three years, and to obtain a permanent resident status after a certain period of time. This preferential treatment offered to foreigners of proven Japanese ancestry has boosted their immigration to Japan: from 8,000 in 1988 to 150, 000 in June 1991 and finally reaching 250,734 in 2004 (Goto 2007, p. 18).

In 1995, 32 *Nisei* from different parts of the country composed the first group of Filipino-Japanese descendants who went to Japan to apply for Japanese nationality. They attended a symposium at Tokyo's Nippon Seinenkan Hall to publicize their plight and to seek support and recognition. Attorney Nishida Kenshi, who acted as the Federation's adviser from 1993 to 1999, represented them and helped them pass their demands to the Japanese government: (1) that the Japanese nationality of those whose names appeared on their family register be recognized; (2) that the parents' marriage of those not listed on this register be entered based on the official record held in the Philippines; (3) that an investigation be conducted for those with unknown parents, as more than 70 percent of the war-displaced, to determine their identities; (4) that a comprehensive survey of war-displaced Japanese in the Philippines be carried out; and (5) that moral and material support be provided to the Japanese community in the Philippines that was disintegrated during the war, in order to facilitate its recovery (Nishida 1995, p. 3).

Only ten (six men and four women) of the 32 *Nisei* applicants were granted Japanese nationality ("War Orphans" 1995, p. 2). They were all from Davao, belonged to Category A (see above), and possessed supporting documents, such as birth or baptismal certificates, parents' marriage contract, affidavits of marriage or birth certificate destruction, or death certificate of their Japanese parent, to support their claims at the beginning of the application process in the Philippines. Among them were the five persons interviewed for the present study. The PNJK accompanied, supported, and assisted them: during the processing of their papers, only Jirou encountered a problem because he had used his Japanese name in the application whereas his birth certificate bore his Filipino name. To

solve the problem, he produced an affidavit stating that he had a Japanese name and that his birth certificate bearing his Japanese name had been destroyed during the war. It took less than three months for the five interviewees to be informed of the approval of their Japanese nationality.

Asked the reason for changing nationality, they all explained that they wanted to strengthen their “real identity”, i.e., their being Japanese; however, it can be assumed that they also considered acquiring Japanese nationality as a door to enjoy economic opportunities in Japan for them and their children. In fact, they had been wishing to go to Japan since long before the launching of the Filipino *Nikkeijin* survey in 1995. During the interviews, they put emphasis on them being biologically (i.e. having Japanese ancestry) and physically (the shape of their eyes, or for some the color of the skin) different from other Filipinos. This self-differentiation from the majority group in society constitutes the “founding act of identity” (Kozakai 2000, p. 33), and the very existence of the term “*Nikkeijin*” reinforces the supposed differences used to construct an imagined border separating Filipinos with Japanese descent from those without. I will discuss later the problematic of the “real identity” discourse in relation to economic empowerment.

The establishment of a *Nikkeijin Kai* federation attests the capability of this minority group to organize and mobilize its members for the group’s cause, which manifests their political self-empowerment, albeit with crucial contribution of external assistance. The federation’s activities (such as holding a national *Nikkeijin*’s convention every two years) as well as those of the PNJK have sustained this process of empowerment, as such activities are intended to elevate the *Nikkeijin*’s socio-economic status both in the Philippines and in Japan. The sustainable operation of *Nikkeijin*’s associations is not only attributed to the collective efforts of the *Nikkeijin* themselves, but also to the financial and moral assistance of some Japanese institutions and organizations. It appears that receiving political recognition from both the Philippine and Japanese governments facilitated the mobilization of *Nikkeijin* in the Philippines, which eventually provided them a social space for identity projection.

Labor migration and the economic dimension of Nikkeijin's empowerment

Nikkeijin's cognitive, psychological, and political empowerment would not have been possible without stable economic sources to back up and sustain their associations and activities. This section highlights the financial/ economic aspect of the Philippines *Nikkeijin's* empowerment.

The PNJK as an independent organization is not affiliated with any Japanese or Filipino associations and institutions except for the *Nikkeijin Kai* federation or FNJKP. The Japan-based NGO *Kigyo Kyogi Kai* financially supports its activities. The Japan Foundation Manila Office also assists it by supplying reading materials such as Japanese magazines and press releases. Moreover, the Philippine government supports it by backing *Nikkeijin's* petitions to the Japanese government to register Category B *Nikkeijin* in their Japanese parent's family register. In 1998, the *Nikkeijin Kai* federation established the *Philippine Nikkeijin Mutual Foundation* (PNJMF) to assist *Nikkeijin* in uplifting their standards of living and help the federation in carrying out its goals and duties. Through this system of assistance, *Nikkeijin* and their founded associations have been assured that their social existence would linger across generations. Recently, the Japanese government started to support logistically the PNJMF training center through a grassroots assistance project aiming at improving the "capacities of the foundation in providing free 40-day intensive lessons on Japanese way of life, culture, and matters related to Japanese employer-employee relations" ("Grassroots Assistance" 2000).

At an individual level, *Nikkeijin* in Davao enjoy economic empowerment through a program assisting them to get Japanese nationality, as well as a package service including pre-departure training. *Nikkeijin* who have been granted Japanese nationality (and have decided to work in Japan) may undergo a two-month Japanese language study in PNJK's office. Their prospective employers in Japan shoulder the expenses. A similar system is observable in all the chapters of the *Nikkeijin Kai* federation in the country. Furthermore, successful applicants choose a job to engage in

and a company to work for. With PNJK's assistance, they subsequently apply for their passport at the Japanese embassy. The PNJK also assists *Nikkeijin* without Japanese nationality (mostly *Sansei* and *Yonsei*) to obtain work visas for Japan. Both the head of PNJMF and that of PNJK monitor the labor contracts and working conditions of *Nikkeijin* workers. They also go to Japan yearly to check if *Nikkeijin* migrants follow their signed contracts. Hence, the main objective of the *Nikkeijin Kai* federation, which is to serve as a coordinator to link Japanese companies with prospective *Nikkeijin* migrant workers, is fulfilled (see FJDSA).

The migration of *Nikkeijin* from the Philippines to Japan is part of the large-scale movement of *Nikkeijin* from different countries, notably from Brazil and Peru. Most *Nikkeijin* migrants are young men below thirty years of age, mostly *Sansei*, working in the Japanese manufacturing sector (Goto 2007, p. 22). Given their comparatively older age, many *Nisei* cannot apply for such demanding jobs. The first group of Filipino *Sansei* arrived in Japan in 1999 as long-term residents through the collective efforts of the local government of Choushi City in Chiba Prefecture, of the companies hiring these migrants, and of *Nikkeijin* associations based in the Philippines and in Japan (Tutor 2007). At present, Filipino *Nikkeijin* are concentrated in the Japanese manufacturing sector as factory workers. This sector forms an economic niche for *Nikkeijin* migrants in Japan. Recently, the great majority of these migrants have found "indirect employment" or employment by labor contractors who dispatch them to production lines under three-month contracts or shorter ones; in this case, *Nikkeijin* migrant workers represent a reliable source of manpower that can meet the immediate demands of Japanese manufacturing companies (see Thranhardt 1999; Knight 2000).

My five interviewees revealed that some of their children or grandchildren were working in Japan, because "Japan is a rich country" and "it is easier to find jobs there than in other countries". Hence, economic motives appear to be their dominant reason for acquiring Japanese nationality, rather than their war-derived stigma of discrimination for years.

Even though they could have moved and lived permanently in Japan, they prefer staying in the Philippines. Celia, Maria and Carmen plan to spend the remaining years of their lives in Davao as they are used to the country's tropical climate and feel less pressured to work than in Japan. Jirou and Roberto have been working in Japan in order to be with their children, but they also spend extended vacations in the Philippines to be with their spouses and to look after their family properties. For these reasons, all of them applied for residence certificate from the Philippine government, in contradiction with their narrative emphasizing that their "real identity" was Japanese. The interviewees' choice of job and place of residence was more influenced by factors such as their age, the country where their family properties are located, the type of climate, and the duties to perform to extended family members in the Philippines than by their Japanese descent.

Issues concerning Filipino *Nikkeijin*

Nikkeijin today cannot be considered anymore as a marginalized group in the Philippine society since their collective efforts to empower themselves have turned their negative images into positive ones. The Japanese government's recognition of their existence by granting them Japanese nationality and allowing them to migrate to Japan has certainly played a great role in such a social image transformation. As I showed in the preceding sections through the case of Davao *Nikkeijin* and their association, the process of *Nikkeijin*'s social empowerment pictures a minority group's struggle and success. Nevertheless, issues and problems remain concerning migration, social class, and identity formation.

Since the launching of the program that assists *Nikkeijin* to get Japanese passport, the PNJK has encountered two major problems regarding Davao *Nikkeijin* working in Japan: instances of exploitation of *Nikkeijin* workers by Japanese employers (requesting them to work more or paying them less than stipulated in the contract), and these workers' sometimes irresponsible behavior (changing job or company in violation of their contract). Other chapters of the *Nikkeijin Kai* federation in the

country have also confronted the same issues. In their attempts to solve these problems, the *Nikkeijin Kai* federation in the Philippines that acts as an intermediary between the *Nikkeijin* and their employers has adopted specific measures. To prevent workers from changing employer, the federation now requires from them a cash bond that would be given to their Japanese employers once they leave before the end of their contract: at the time of the interview, a cash bond of 25,000 pesos was required from *Nikkeijin* workers before their departure to Japan. If they stay in the company as expected, this cash bond will be refunded to them at the end of their contract. PNJK also warns Davao *Nikkeijin* migrants that it will blacklist the names of those who violate their labor contract, as well as those of their wives, children, and grandchildren. Regarding labor exploitation, PNJK gives the *Nikkeijin* workers questionnaire of evaluation to be filled-up and sent back after two months to monitor their working conditions and seek immediate solutions in case of exploitation. According to the five *Nisei* interviewed, the living conditions of their children and grandchildren in Japan are constantly looked after by the PNJK and the FNJKP. The implementation of these measures has reduced the number of problems encountered by the PNJK.

However, recent problems of human trafficking appear more difficult to solve. The International Labor Organization reports that some “foundations” pretending to help *Nikkeijin* to work in Japan are in reality “trafficking fronts” connected with the *yakuza* (ILO 2004, p. 23). There is also the problem of false *Nikkeijin* who pretend to have lost their important records that could prove their Japanese origin. Problems such as these show that *Nikkeijin* migration, like those of other migration streams in the world, has turned into a complex social process and therefore has become more difficult to control. Moreover, the trafficking of “true” and “false” *Nikkeijin* into Japan put into question the capacity of “authentic” *Nikkeijin* foundations and associations to safeguard the well-being of their members against unscrupulous individuals and groups. As the *Nikkeijin* migration phenomenon becomes more common and immigration policy in Japan less strict for unskilled workers (as the result of the 1990 revised Japanese

Immigration Law), the assistance offered by Philippine-based *Nikkeijin* NGOs like PNJK to would-be migrants becomes progressively insufficient.

Another issue raised by *Nikkeijin* empowerment in the Philippine setting touches the concept of social class mobility. Migrating and working in Japan have improved the socio-economic status of the families in the Philippines of this minority group. In Japan, their social class position is generally considered higher than that of Filipino entertainers. Working in the manufacturing sector rather than in the entertainment industry has given *Nikkeijin* a positive image of Filipino migrant workers in Japan as a crucial work force sustaining Japan's economic development. Nevertheless, *Nikkeijin* in Japan remain a minority group considered internally and externally as "different". Even though their migration has provided them with a source of symbolic capital allowing them to access the higher echelons of the social hierarchy in the Philippines, the type of work they are engaged in, unskilled and manual, and their obvious cultural difference from native Japanese have put them in an inferior social class position in Japan. This "contradictory social class mobility" (Parreñas 2001, p. 150-196) of *Nikkeijin* migrants from the Philippines resembles more or less that of Filipino domestic workers: upward social class mobility "here" (in the Philippines) as they accumulate symbolic capital, but downward mobility "there" (overseas) as they perform socially less-valored jobs that do not please anymore the majority population in the receiving countries.

Furthermore, the Japanese government's granting of nationality to some *Nikkeijin* and the *Nikkeijin*'s desire to acquire such nationality raise the question of *Nikkeijin*'s identity. Are they Japanese by ancestry or citizenship but culturally Filipino? Or do they possess equally mixed Japanese and Filipino identities? These questions go beyond the scope of the present study but, as shown in the preceding sections on Davao *Nikkeijin*'s empowerment, it is obvious that the *Nikkeijin*'s claim of being Japanese or Filipino is contextual and negotiated. As a response to social discrimination after World War II, they adopted ways to reinforce their

“Filipino-ness” and hide their Japanese ethnic origin. When an opportunity to become Japanese arrived, they sought ways to acquire Japanese nationality hoping to insure the future of their children and grandchildren through long-term labor migration to Japan. That is to say, they have reinforced their Japanese identity acquired through blood as a strategy of family reproduction and upward social class mobility in the Philippines. These cases resemble those of Okinawan women migrants in the Philippines who displayed both primordial and situational identities: when they arrived in the country, they subsumed their primordial identity in order to be accepted in the Philippine society, but as Japan became an economically progressive country, they began to highlight their own “Japaneseness” allowing them to take advantage of the economic opportunities presented to them (Maehara 2001, p. 75).

Tsuda Takeyuki illustrates in his study of Brazilian *Nikkeijin* in Japan that they were “positive minorities” (1999, p. 147) in Brazil, socially respected and enjoying a socio-cultural prestige they believed to be resulting from their Japanese ancestry; consequently, they developed a strong Japanese identity. On the contrary, when they migrated to Japan, they became a “negative minority” or “a group that suffers from low social status, cultural disparagement, and discrimination” (Tsuda 1998, p. 321). As a result, most of them developed an ethnic counter-identity and eventually emphasized their Brazilianness as a form of resistance to the cultural pressures that Japanese society placed on them (Tsuda 2000, p. 60). Based on these studies, *Nikkeijin* migrants from the Philippines who are likewise concentrated in Japan’s manufacturing industry as their Brazilian counterparts presumably experience similar difficulties in fully integrating themselves into the Japanese society. Daniela de Carvalho (2003, p. 196-197) remarks in her study of *Nikkei* communities in Japan the problematic concept of *Nikkeijin* that challenges Japanese and non-Japanese identities:

The concept of “blood”, Japanese culture and Japanese language have become inextricably linked and have been used to determine who is (and can be) Japanese. The *Nikkeijin* as a category dismantle

this concept, since they share the 'blood' but not the commonalities of Japanese culture and mother tongue.

This remark points to the Japanese homogeneity myth: in the case of *Nikkeijin* migrants, their partial "Japaneseness" and their mixed cultural background impede them from being fully accepted as Japanese in the Japanese society. As for the Filipino *Nikkeijin*, the discourse of restoring their "Japaneseness" is likely to endure since it is the easiest way for them to justify their application for Japanese nationality.

Conclusion

This article has shown the process of *Nikkeijin*'s empowerment in the Philippines as viewed through the case of Davao *Nikkeijin* and their associations. The historical background of Japanese immigration in the Philippines, specifically in Davao and in the aftermath of the Pacific War, shows that "*Nikkeijin*" is both an internally and externally ascribed category that acquired negative, but later positive connotation in the country. Examining the cognitive, psychological, political and economic dimensions of empowerment, it appears that *Nikkeijin*'s social empowerment resulted from the dynamic interaction between external (Japanese government's initiative, Japan-based NGOs' actions, Philippine government's recognition) and internal (collective awareness and mobilization) forces. It is also evident that through the PNJK, *Nikkeijin* in Davao have played a great role in organizing a national federation of the *Nikkeijin* communities in the Philippines. Through its different activities, *Nikkeijin* have become a socially visible and accepted group, and migration to Japan has been a significant driving force in this process.

It is observed that the *Nikkeijin* migration to Japan has turned them from a socially displaced into a socially valued minority group in the Philippines. Their case affirms how descent can become a passport to social mobility, while allowing them to ensure the social reproduction or social continuity of their family and of their group. The acquisition of

Japanese nationality (for some *Nisei*) or of the right to work in Japan (for *Nisei*, *Sansei* and *Yonsei*) marks the end of their long years of social alienation, a kind of success to guarantee their better socio-economic status in the Philippines, because empowerment needs resources to continuously nurture it. Studying *Nikkeijin* in the context of migration could provide useful insights to understand profoundly the concept of empowerment and its relation to individual and collective identity formation. The discrimination they used to face in the Philippines seems over, but now it is in Japan that Filipino *Nikkeijin* appear to encounter discrimination, as evidenced by the cases of labor exploitation reported by the PNJK. Such recent issues have not yet been much studied and will represent an interesting topic of investigation in the future. The analysis offered in this article could serve as a point of departure for such studies.

Notes

- 1 Migration is understood here as the relatively permanent inflow and outflow of people from one place, country or region into another.
- 2 Translation by the author
- 3 American military installations in the Philippines, such as in Baguio, Pampanga, Tarlac and Cabanatuan were also attacked during this time.
- 4 Names of the interviewees have been modified.
- 5 It is the copy of one's family record bearing the names of all family members in a household and other pertinent information about them such as their permanent address, date of birth and death, and date and place of marriage. It forms the basis of Japanese nationality.
- 6 Details about this center can be found on its official website at <http://www.pnlsc.com/english/index.html>
- 7 This is in accordance to section 8 of the IPRA stating that "marriages performed in accordance with customary laws, rites, traditions and practices shall be recognized as valid" ("Rules and Regulations" 1998, p. 23).

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