

# Diverging Narratives: Lives and Identities of Japanese-Filipino Children in the Philippines

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## **Abstract**

This study focuses on the lives of Japanese-Filipino children who are based in the Philippines, particularly on their identity/ies and social location in the society. One-on-one interviews were conducted by the author with nine respondents. In-depth life history interviews were then carried out with three selected respondents. Using Practice Theory as a framework of analysis, the study reveals that there are different ways that the Japanese-Filipino children craft themselves, mainly because of the different webs of relations that an individual interacts with. This conforms to the concept of identity as being fluid, multi-faceted and changing over time. Most importantly, this study reveals a kind of divide that seems to exist between those Japanese-Filipino children who belong to NGOs and those who (refuse) do not belong to any organization. Class appears to play a major role in this divide; a factor that is often overlooked in the existing studies about the Japanese-Filipino children.

Keywords: Japanese-Filipino children; identity; class; power and agency; life history

## Introduction

THE PHILIPPINES HAS A LONG HISTORY of migration. Over the years, a significant number of Filipinos have gone to live and work in different parts of the world, particularly in the United States and the Middle East. Japan's high economic growth in the 1970s also attracted foreign workers, especially from Asia, to the country. A large number of migrant workers came as manual laborers to the unskilled jobs sector even though the Japanese government officially accepted only skilled workers (Sellek 1997, 178). At that time, the Philippines was facing the twin crises of unemployment and balance of payment deficit. As a temporary stopgap measure to address the crises, the administration of former President Ferdinand Marcos adopted a policy of exporting labor to foreign countries (Takeda and Erpelo 2008, 2). It was also during this period when "a number of male foreigners, including the Japanese, came to the Philippines for 'sex tourism'" (Suzuki 2010, 34), an unfavorable consequence of the development in the tourism industry. By the end of the 1970s, the Japanese tourists accounted for nearly one-third of all the tourists in the Philippines. In the 1980s about eighty percent of the Japanese tourists were men (*ibid.*).

The 1980s also saw an increasing number of Filipino women leaving the Philippines to work abroad as domestic helpers, entertainers, and health workers. In Japan, however, most of the Filipino women worked as entertainers, especially after the Japanese government, with the cooperation of the Philippine government, eased its requirement for "entertainer" visas in 1981 (Dinan 2000). In the present decade, migration still continues, wherein Filipino women are deployed to different parts of the world, with high concentrations in the Middle East (Saudi and United Arab Emirates), as well as in Hong Kong and Singapore (POEA Annual Report 2010). As of 2008 (since after 2008, the Overseas Performing Artist [OPA] category is no longer used in POEA reports), Japan was still the top recipient of Filipino OPAs, despite stricter regulatory measures by the Japanese and Philippine governments in 2004, as indicated in Table 1 below.

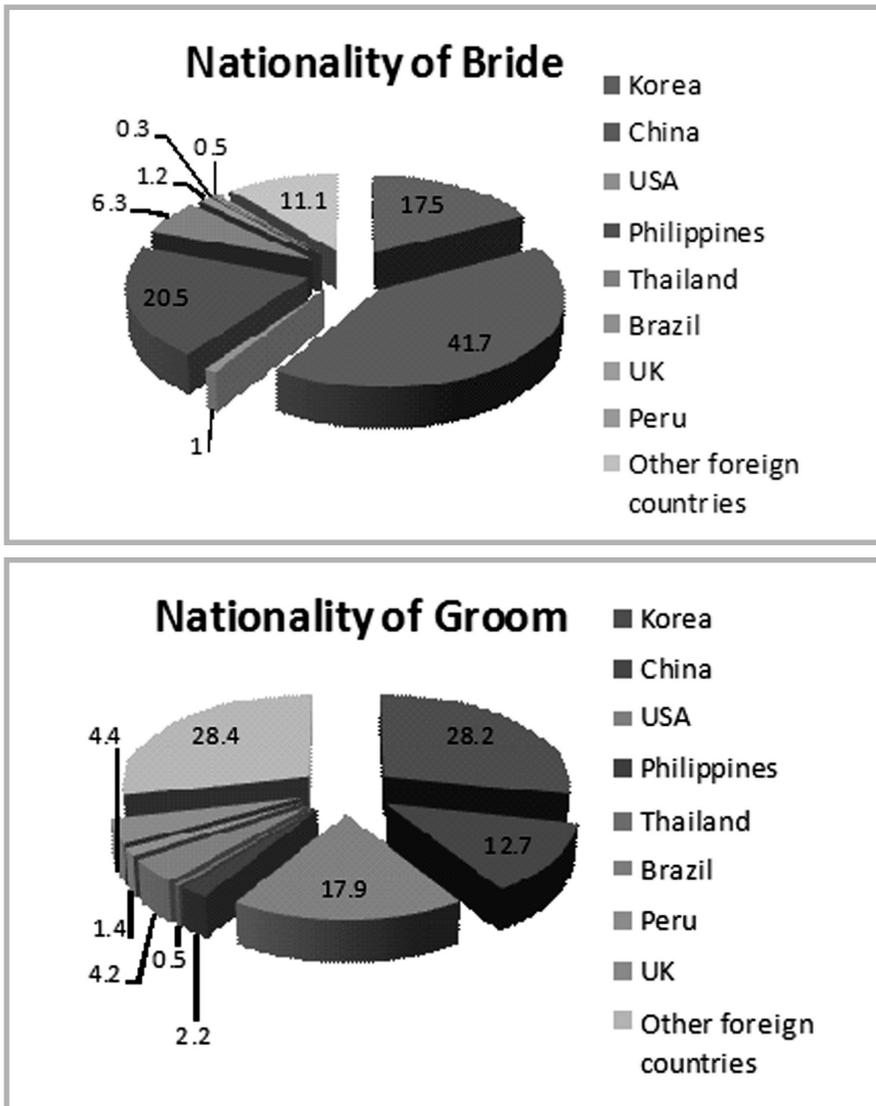
TABLE 1: Deployment of Overseas Performing Artists by Selected Destinations - New Hires (POEA 2008)

Destinations	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Japan	59,568	70,244	73,246	57,605	70,628	38,533	6,672	4,592	2,380
Korea	3	94	256	237	615	687	487	1,350	1,020
China	35	13	3	15	47	93	62	21	30
Hongkong	18	13	4	5	22	75	42	113	114
Bahrain	36	43	9	0	12	9	24	43	74

Many of these female entertainers have children with Japanese nationals, regardless of whether they are married or not especially in cases where the other already has a family. The increasing number of Japanese-Filipino children can be attributed to both the continuous entry of Filipina women to Japan, and the arrival of Japanese tourists who came to the Philippines particularly during the 1970s and 1980s. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2009) estimates that there are about 200,000 Japanese-Filipino children in the Philippines as of 2009. While a number of “Japanese Filipino Children” (JFC) grew up with a secured nationality,<sup>1</sup> some of them had problems with their “citizenship,” since they were not recognized earlier by their Japanese fathers (Suzuki 2010).

Japan, despite its low population of resident foreigners, is notable for its rising rate of international marriages, particularly between a Japanese husband and a foreign wife. As a result, children of mixed ethnicities continue to be born in Japan or abroad. In 2012, out of 668, 895 marriages, 23, 657 (3.5%) were international marriages; moreover, the number of foreign brides (17,198) still exceeds that of foreign grooms (6,459) (Japan Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare Vital Statistics 2012). It is striking that the gendered pattern of Japanese-husband-and foreign-wife is most prominent in marriages between Japanese and Filipinos (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1  
Nationality of Bride/Groom (by percentage) of a Japanese national  
(Japan Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare 2012)



In 2012, 96.2 percent of Japanese-Filipino marriages fit that pattern while those between Japanese husbands and Chinese wives, the highest incident of foreign brides, account for only 90% of the total marriages involving this nationality (MHLW 2012).

The modern history of the children of Japanese and Filipino unions dates to as far as the late nineteenth century when Japanese migrants came to the Philippines as part of the strategy of the Meiji government to alleviate problems of population explosion (Sellek 1997, 187). Though there were already a number of Japanese migrants to parts of the Philippine archipelago such as Panay (Mabunay 2006), it was not until the 1900s that an increasing number of male Japanese *dekasegi* (contractual) workers came to the Philippines and worked in building infrastructures in Baguio, such as Kennon Road in 1903 (Fresnoza-Flot 2008, 74). While some of these Japanese migrants brought Japanese wives with them, others married local women and lived peacefully in Baguio before World War II. When the war broke out, Japanese migrants, as well as their descendants who were old enough, were drafted by the Japanese military to work as interpreters and translators. The younger men were conscripted into the Japanese armed forces (Afable 2008, 36). After Japan's defeat in World War II, however, those who were not repatriated to Japan (many of whom were younger *Nisei* [second-generation]) had to conceal their Japanese ancestry to avoid discrimination from the local community, who often labelled them as [Japanese] "collaborators" (Fresnoza-Flot 2008, 78–79).

The case of the Philippine *nikkeijin* (as they came to be called) started to gain media attention in the 1980s when animosity towards Japan had died out and some of those families who were separated during the war started to look for their family members. This is heavily documented by Afable's (2008) study on the *nikkeijin* in Baguio. *Nikkeijin* generally refers to "a person of Japanese descent who is living outside Japan, including also those who have immigrated to Japan (Ohno 2007a, 243).

The revision of the Immigration Control Act of Japan in 1990 legitimated the long-term stay of nikkeijin up to the third generation [*sansei*] who hadn't been Japanese nationals. It is important to mention that some of the nikkeijin started to enter Japan in the late 1980s and participate in the labor force (Sellek 2007). However, most of the Philippine nikkeijin were not able to enjoy this privilege because they lacked the proper documentation with which they could prove their Japanese ancestry. The documents were either destroyed to conceal their Japanese ancestry or their births were not registered at all in the *koseki tohon* or family registry in Japan (Ohno 2008, 6). However, according to Flot's (2008) study, the eventual migration of those who were granted Japanese nationality indicated the importance of having "Japanese blood," which was a form of (socio-economic) empowerment since it allowed them to work in Japan and possibly improve their lives in the Philippines.

Aside from the nikkeijin, a new generation of children born to Japanese and Filipino parents particularly since 1980s came to be called *shin-nikkeijin* (*shin* meaning *new*). The new term served to distinguish them from the descendants of pre-war Japanese migrants. Shin-nikkeijin often carries a connotation of being children of "entertainers" (Suzuki 2010, 31). *Japanese Filipino Children* (JFC) is another label that has come to be applied to the children born of Japanese and Filipino unions. The term was popularized by NGOs assisting children of Filipino and Japanese parents (such as DAWN), particularly those who hardly knew their fathers. Thus, the term might carry a connotation of being "abandoned" by their Japanese fathers. This particular study focuses on the children of Filipino and Japanese parents, and those who do not belong to any NGOs. I will be using the term *Japanese-Filipino children* (note the hyphen and smaller *c* in *children*) in an effort to use a more neutral term than those mentioned above. The term is used to indicate their dual ethnicity<sup>2</sup> and to distinguish them from the nikkeijin, particularly the *Nisei*, who are either children of pre-war Japanese-Filipino unions or of both Japanese migrants to the Philippines. To avoid confusion, the study will use "Japanese-Filipino children" to refer exclusively to those born in the 1980s and 1990s.

In 2008, the revision in the Nationality Law of Japan gave the children of Japanese nationals born after 1985 outside of wedlock a chance to become Japanese nationals if they were recognized by their Japanese fathers even after their birth (Ministry of Justice, The Nationality Law). This revision can be interpreted as an effort to address the clamour to have a “Japanese nationality” of the growing number of Japanese-Filipino children who were born during the 80s and 90s, to mostly, if not all, Filipina entertainers and their Japanese partners. Moreover, the revision somehow placed the Japanese-Filipino children in a privileged position; unlike those who do not have “Japanese blood,” Japanese-Filipino children could now travel to Japan more easily. Nevertheless, media reports (Agnote 2008; Valmero 2009; Bullied in Japan, pre-teen half-Pinay commits suicide 2010; Matsubara 2012;) and a number of studies (Nuqui 2008; Seiger 2010; Suzuki 2010; Jabar 2011; Ito 2011; Asakawa 2013), including publications of some non-government organizations (NGOs) (Arboleda and Nuqui 2010), continued to emphasize the negative plight of Japanese-Filipino children born in the 1980s and 1990s. They are often stereotypically depicted as underprivileged, a group that seeks recognition from their respective Japanese fathers (so that they could go to Japan). At the same time, Japanese-Filipino children in Japan are perceived as migrants that endure hardships. Such depiction ignores those who were recognized from birth by their Japanese parent and/or those who do not belong to any NGO. More significantly, few (Seiger 2010) studies have given attention to Japanese-Filipino children who live in the Philippines and do not belong to any NGOs that assist Japanese-Filipino children. This study aims to fill these gaps. And it is in this context that I pose my research problem: How do Japanese-Filipino children who live in the Philippines and are not members of NGOs that provide assistance to Japanese-Filipino children construct their identity and social location in Philippine society?

The study involved two phases of one-on-one interviews with selected respondents based on the following criteria:

- a. Children of Japanese and Filipino parents who negotiate their identity that includes both Filipino and Japanese ancestry.
- b. Japanese-Filipino children between 18 and 30 years old; they were born during the so-called influx of Filipino women entertainers to Japan in the 1980s and 1990s.
- c. Japanese-Filipino children who are non-members of or not affiliated to organizations assisting Japanese-Filipino children. Non-membership in NGOs entails less influence of these organizations on one's identity formation.
- d. Japanese-Filipino children who are based in the Philippines.

This study employs purposeful sampling, crucially filtering for an individual's non-membership to any organization providing assistance to Japanese-Filipino children. It also utilizes the snowball sampling technique to address the difficulty in obtaining respondents based on the criteria above. Most of the respondents were recruited through referrals from other respondents, and from the author's friends and colleagues. Hence, it should be taken into consideration the possible influence of the author's background on the respondents recruited for this study. In addition, given the nature of the size and sampling of my respondents, the study should not be seen as a general representation of the Japanese-Filipino children in the Philippines. The study should be treated as an indicator of the possible role that belonging to an organization (that hints the factor of class) may play in studying the case of the Japanese-Filipino children in general. The study aims to create room for further research on this subject matter.

In-depth interviews lasting for one-and-a-half to two-and-a-half hours were conducted with nine (9) respondents in several locations (Quezon City, Las Piñas, and Bulacan). Interviews started in August 2012 and lasted until March 2013. All the interviews were recorded using a

digital voice recorder with the permission of the respondents. Ethical consideration was given importance. To protect their identity and privacy, the author assigned pseudonyms to each respondent and to other people whom they mentioned. The pseudonyms reflect whether the respondent has a Japanese or non-Japanese name.

Of the nine respondents, three were chosen for another set of interviews, the life history interviews, to obtain an in-depth understanding of how identity formation varies per individual. Selections of three respondents were based on some factors that the author deemed significant for the study: 1) self-identification; 2) relations with parents; 3) nature of relationship with friends; and finally 4) school experiences. The lengthy life history interviews were divided into two sessions so as not to exhaust the respondent (and the interviewer) and to ensure quality answers. Each session usually lasted for about two to two-and-a-half hours.

Given the small sampling size and the study's focus on identity, subjectivity, and agency, life history was chosen as a method because it provides a more in-depth understanding of an individual's life experiences, especially as a child of Japanese and Filipino parents in the Philippines. Life history may be referred to as "one rather peculiar and specific kind of narrative, a collaborative product [of] the dialogical relationship between teller and listener" (Waterson 2007, 3). As a method, it does not concern itself with the representativeness of the subject/respondent. According to Waterson,

it is the distinctive positioning of the subject that gives the narrative its authenticity, not the question of whether that individual is "average" or typical. However apparently unique, the individual's story will always be representative of the experience of living at that particular historical conjuncture, faced with those particular contradictions, opportunities or constraints (ibid 14).

Waterson also acknowledges the fact that while no ethnography can possibly say everything about a society, even life history or any other account is incomplete and composed of fragments. And so are identities.

Sherry Ortner’s Practice Theory, guided by Phenomenology, is primarily utilized as tool of analysis. One of the essential aspects of Practice Theory is its idea of “the production of social subjects through practice in the world, and of the production of the world itself through practice” (Ortner 2006, 16). The latter part proves to be crucial since it provides a dialectical synthesis of “structure” (defined as the social world as constituted) and “agency” (the interested practices of real people). Practice Theory emphasizes the actor in relation to a larger structure. Thus, in analyzing a particular case, Practice Theory does not treat it as an isolated phenomenon, but treats it in reference to a larger one. Finally, Ortner’s two forms of social embeddedness is an excellent point of analysis in treating individual cases; it helps in understanding the dynamics and influences of different kinds of relations that an individual has on other people and society in general.

**FIGURE 2**  
Japanese-Filipino child’s web of (societal) relations  
(Created by the author)

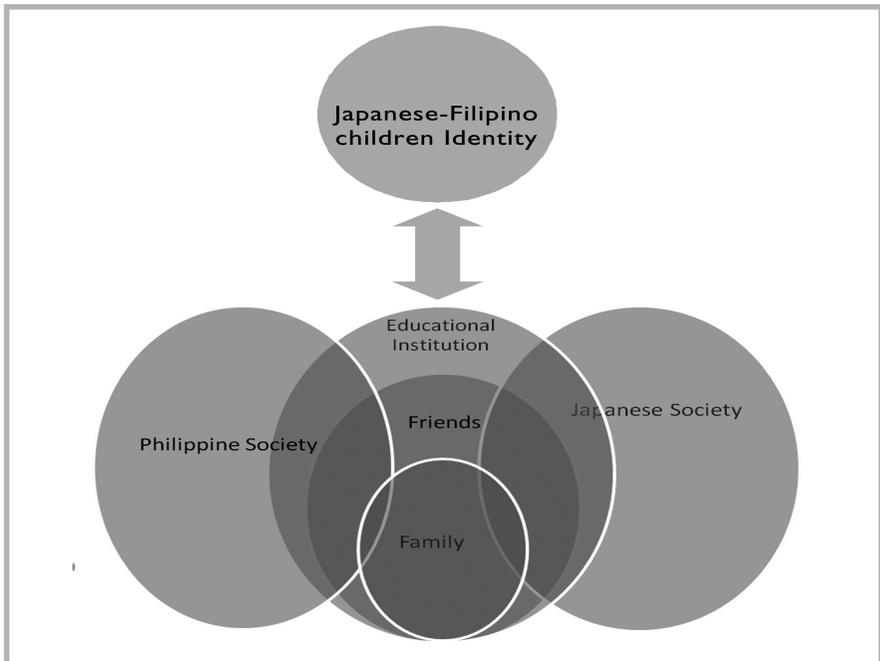


TABLE 2: Respondents' Profiles

<b>Name/Sex</b>	<b>Birth Year</b>	<b>Birthplace</b>	<b>Passport/ Document of Recognition as Filipino Citizen</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Parent's Occupation (a): Mother/father</b>	<b>Schools Attended</b>
Sakura/F	1991	Tokyo, Japan	Japan/Yes	UP Student	Clerk/ Businessman	Southville International School (K-12); University of the Philippines Diliman
Hiroshi/M	1993	Bulacan, Philippines	Japan/Yes	UP Student	Laundry house/ convenience store attendant	Integrated School of Montessori(K-12); University of the Philippines Diliman
Ayaka/F	1988	Kanagawa, Japan	Japan/Yes	UP Student	Entertainer/ Jazz player	Divine Light Academy (prep-g4); Elizabeth Seton School (g5); Junior and Senior High School at Kanagawa, Japan; Kanagawa Prefecture College of Foreign Studies (2-yr course)/ University of the Philippines Diliman (BA)
Yumiko/F	1993	Tokyo, Japan	Japan/Yes	UP Student	Entertainer/ salary man	Pre-school in Japan; St. Francis of Assisi College(pre-p-g1); Elizabeth Seton School (g2-hs); University of the Philippines Diliman
Mary Joy/F	1990	Makati, Philippines	Philippines	AMA Graduate/ Working	Entertainer/ clerk (TV network)	St. Francis of Assisi College (g1-g3); Vergonville Elementary and High School (g4-1 <sup>st</sup> hs); St. Therese School (2 <sup>nd</sup> hs-4 <sup>th</sup> hs); AMA College

Name/Sex	Birth Year	Birthplace	Passport/ Document of Recognition as Filipino Citizen	Occupation	Parent's Occupation (a): Mother/father	Schools Attended
Jiro/M	1991	Pasay, Philippines	Philippines	UPLB Graduate/ Working	Restaurant waitress-Supervisor/ Landscape gardening (own business)	University of Perpetual Help Sytem Dalta (pre-school-4 <sup>th</sup> year hs); University of the Philippines Los Baños
Sayuri/F	1992	Bulacan, Philippines	Japan/No	CEU-Bulacan Student	Recruitment agent/engineer	Integrated School of Montessori (prep-g2); Lord Angel's Montessori (g3-g4); grade 4-Senior High School at Kanagawa Japan; Centro Escolar University, Bulacan
John Michael Ray/M	1989	Quezon City, Philippines	CEU-Manila	Philippines	Entertainer/ Yakuza	Diliman Preparatory School (g1-hs); Mapua Institute of Technology, Manila; Centro Escolar University (stayed 2 yrs; Centro Escolar University, Manila (transferred)
Mayumi/F	1992	Osaka, Japan	Japan/Yes	MAPUA Student	Bar in the Philippines/ Construction worker	Prep-grade two at Elementary School in Osaka, Japan; Christian Values School (grade 2-hs); Mapua Institute of Technology, Manila

a. Refers to the occupation of the biological father of the respondent (at the time when parents met) since there are those whose parents divorced and the mother now has a different husband/partner.

Utilizing Ortner's Practice Theory, the conceptual framework assumes a distinct identity for Japanese-Filipino children as a group because of their dual ethnicity. But because of the stereotypical notions or connotations that some terms carry, different terms have emerged to specifically refer to their group. However, how an individual views or affiliates one's self to a particular group is affected or influenced by the different structures that one constantly deals with and by the acts or reflections of an individual on these influences. The double-headed arrow signifies the two-way relationship between the individual and social structures; the individual acts in the world but is also acted upon. At a macro level, it is assumed that both the Japanese and Philippine societies exert some form of influence (directly or indirectly) over the individual.

The circles enclosing "dual ethnicity" are perceived as fluid but also depend on one's social location. Since an individual is also endowed with "agency," (one's own desire and intention within a matrix of subjectivity) one does not completely succumb to the influences of either or both societies. Furthermore, since it is assumed that an individual is also embedded in different forms of relations that he/she has to constantly deal with, how he/she lives and identifies him/herself also varies. For this particular study, I focused on the respondents' relations or experiences with their 1) families, particularly their parents and upbringing; 2) friends, in terms of their ethnicity; and finally 3) educational institutions, focusing on the nature of the school (i.e. policies) and their social relations in it.

### **Lives and Statures In the Philippines**

My study on the Japanese-Filipino children born in the 1980s and 1990s and based in the Philippines depicts a different picture of Japanese-Filipino children, who are seen in previous research as impoverished and seeking recognition from their Japanese fathers (Nuqui 2008; Suzuki 2010; Arboleda and Nuqui 2010; Ito 2011; Asakawa 2013). All my respondents, with the exception of Mary Joy, are leading a relatively better life in the

Philippines. This is more evident in the case of those who have lived in Japan and have noticed the difference in their economic status in the Philippines. Mayumi, who was born and raised in Japan until she was about eight years old, recounted that her family was poor<sup>3</sup> in Japan; but when she transferred to the Philippines, her mother had provided for her needs in the form of balikbayan boxes or money remittances. Yumiko revealed that they had to do all the household work whenever they went to Japan for holidays, unlike in the Philippines, where they have a maid. For Ayaka, the Philippines gave her opportunities she could not have had in Japan where she has been living since she was 13. Ayaka's main motivation for returning to the Philippines was that she could afford to pursue a higher education there.

All of my respondents have attended either international schools or private schools and some have even attended (or are attending) premier universities in the Philippines. Those who have already graduated are also stably employed in decent companies in the country. Among my respondents, only Mary Joy attended a public school in the Philippines. But after her aunt, who works in Japan, helped finance her education, she was able to study again in a private school. These factors may indicate my respondents' relatively better socio-economic status in the Philippines. Mary Joy elaborated on this experience. When she first transferred to St. Therese, a private school, from a public school, she felt like an outcast because she was perceived as poor. Because of that she was forced to socialize more and resorted to treating her friends out. Among all my respondents, Sakura verbalized her better socio-economic status most clearly, saying that her school (Southvilles)<sup>4</sup> mostly admitted children of "upper middle-class" families.

When it comes to their assessment about their overall life in the Philippines, most of them say that they have no problem integrating in Philippine society, particularly in their close circle of friends and acquaintances. In fact, most of them think that sometimes they are given special treatment just because they are "half-Japanese" and at times are mistaken for a "foreigner."<sup>5</sup> However, they still acknowledge the fact that

sometimes they cannot escape being stereotyped as “poor in English” because of their “Japanese blood,” or being teased as a child of either a “Japayuki” or a Japanese soldier during World War II. But most of them pointed out that these were just forms of teasing and did not really lead to discrimination. Among my nine respondents, only Mary Joy expressed feelings of discrimination whenever her classmates raised the issue of her being half-Japanese. She felt quite ashamed that she did not know her father while at the same time concealing her mother’s entertainer background.

It is also worth emphasizing that majority of my respondents are recognized by their Japanese fathers since they were born, a fact that plays a vital role in their acquisition of Japanese nationality. When I recruited respondents for my study, I did not intentionally seek those who are recognized by their Japanese parent; my only filter was that they should not be affiliated to any NGOs assisting Japanese descendants in the Philippines. As it turned out, all but one of my respondents are recognized by their Japanese fathers (at least from the day they were conceived/born). This holds true even for those whose parents are not legally married, as in Jiro’s case, whose father still visits them every now and then in the Philippines. The recognition explains why most of them—Sakura, Ayaka, Yumiko, Sayuri, and Mayumi—have held Japanese passports since birth. Hiroshi, who used to hold dual citizenship has already chosen “Japanese nationality” and is now carrying a Japanese passport. But for Philippine-born children like Jiro, John, and Mary Joy, who did not previously have a Japanese passport, obtaining a Japanese nationality (as a child of a Japanese national) is now impossible since they are all over the age of 20. Article 3 of the 2008 revised Nationality Law (2008) states that individuals who are under 20 years old, and are recognized by his/her Japanese [national] father or mother, can acquire Japanese nationality by applying to the Minister of Justice (Ministry of Justice, The Nationality Law). John was just able to obtain a long-term visa as a child of a Japanese national. Meanwhile, the papers of Jiro and his siblings were being processed (at the time of the interview) to facilitate their travel to Japan. Mary Joy’s aunt, who is already a permanent resident in Japan, has promised to help

her get a visa (although she cannot elaborate what kind) to Japan so that she could be with her aunt there.

Most of my respondents maintain contact with their Japanese fathers, albeit in varying degrees. This holds true even for those whose parents have divorced or separated. Sakura and Ayaka grew up with their fathers around; Hiroshi, Yumiko, and Jiro have a “long-distance relationship” with their fathers who work in Japan. They talk frequently on the phone, and their fathers occasionally visit them in the Philippines or they themselves travel to Japan. Despite their parents’ divorce, Mayumi and Sayuri still keep in touch with their fathers and spend time with them whenever they can. John’s communication with his father was totally cut off after his parents separated when he was 10 years old. John’s father visited him when he was six or seven years old, and that was the last time John saw him; even so, John communicated with him through phone until his parents’ separation. He tried looking for his father when he, John, was in Japan but his mother told him that his father was too ashamed to meet him since he was not able to raise and support him.

It is clear that majority of my respondents have lived with their Japanese fathers at some point in their lives. This puts into question the prevailing image of Japanese-Filipino children born in the 1980s and 1990s as completely abandoned by their Japanese fathers or were born “fatherless.” It also challenges the notion that these children have strained relationships with their Japanese fathers and that their relationship is only “symbolic,” done solely to seek parental recognition and obtain Japanese nationality or long-term visas.

However, one respondent slightly conforms to this stereotype of Japanese-Filipino children. Among my respondents, Mary Joy is not recognized by and has not even met her Japanese father. Relevantly, she is the sole respondent whose mother at some point sought help from an NGO to locate her father, although this was not pursued. While Mary Joy initially wanted to know her father, she also resented the fact that he did not look for her. “Why bother and look for him?” she said. Nonetheless,

she does not really blame her father because she also recognizes her mother's fault in losing communication with him. This brings me to the different attitudes of my respondents to existing NGOs that assist to Japanese-Filipino children.

While most of my respondents recognize the help that these organizations extend to Japanese-Filipino children like them, they themselves have not seen the point of joining these organizations. Hiroshi, for instance, was invited by one of the organizations to join when he was in college. But upon learning from that NGO's website that their focus was primarily on those who were seeking recognition from their Japanese fathers, he felt awkward to be with them and did not join in the end. Yumiko, on the other hand, heard about these organizations in high school from another "half-Japanese" schoolmate who she thought was related to the organization. However, she thinks that, according to her mother, she herself does not need to join or get in touch with these organizations. Yumiko was told that these organizations are for those who were not acknowledged by their Japanese father and ended up not having [any] "citizenship."

Those who do not have any direct encounters with these organizations barely know about them or their activities. While they appreciate the possible help that these organizations can extend to other children, my respondents did not feel the need to take part in them. John and Jiro expressed similar sentiments. They claimed that they are already content with their lives and do not need support groups. Sakura said as much, saying that she grew up with both her parents around, as did Sayuri, who has known her Japanese father since she was young.

My respondents' Filipina parents took on different jobs when they were in Japan. Not all of them came to Japan as entertainers, as in the case of Sakura's mother who was a clerk; or Jiro's mother, who worked as a restaurant supervisor. In spite of that, it is undeniable that majority of my respondents' mothers were entertainers in Japan at some point in their lives. It is important to recall that in the 1970s, Japanese women<sup>6</sup> were

replaced by foreigners, mostly women from Asia, in the entertainment industry. This could be an indicator that the source of stigma or discrimination of being a child of an entertainer is not only rooted in ethnicity (because they are only half-Japanese) but also in class,<sup>7</sup> since an “entertainer” is not considered a prestigious job. Ortner elaborated on this tendency to ignore class in her study of the Class of '58 of Weequahic High School<sup>8</sup> in New Jersey. She argues how “class” exists in America but is “hidden” or spoken through other languages of difference such as that of race, ethnicity, and gender (2006, 72). Nevertheless, it is important to consider the different circumstances that forced these women to work as entertainers. Mayumi’s mother first went to Japan not as an entertainer, but as a wife of a Japanese national after their marriage in the Philippines. However, her financial difficulties in Japan pushed her to seek a job first in a manufacturing company, which later closed down. She then transferred to a snack bar and after a couple of years, went into caregiving.

This finding fits Suzuki’s<sup>9</sup> critique of the skewed representations of the union between Japanese husbands and Filipino wives. She argues that not all Filipino wives are so-called ethnicized brides or *Japayukis*. Mayumi’s description of her father as “very *probinsyano*” and her mother as “classy” clearly challenges the misconception about Filipino wives. This goes to show that Filipina migrants are somehow “empowered,” particularly in rural Japan. They are epitomized as modern and cosmopolitan, unlike their husbands from the Japanese countryside (Faier 2009). Following also Fuwa and Anderson’s study,<sup>10</sup> some of these women maintained successful relationships with their Japanese husbands despite the different circumstances. The mothers of some of my respondents kept their families intact, regardless of the distance between Japan and the Philippines. The Filipino mothers were also able to send their children to good schools and provide them a relatively comfortable life, especially in the Philippines. Even those who became single mothers were able to support their (extended) families in the Philippines. With the exception of those like Yumiko, Mary Joy, and Jiro, all of my respondents’ mothers currently work in Japan, mostly in factories and dry cleaning shops. Some stayed on even after giving birth to their child/ren, while others returned

to Japan after spending some time in the Philippines. Frequent travel between Japan and the Philippines has become inevitable, as has for their children. Clearly, one has to see these Filipino women beyond their “entertainer” background.

Transnational connections with Japan also need to be considered to understand identity construction among Japanese-Filipino children, as they affect an individual’s “practices of constructing, maintaining, and negotiating identities” (Vertovec 2001, 575). Transnationalism refers to “exchanges, connections and practices across borders, transcending the national space as the primary reference point for activities and identities” (International Organization for Migration 2010, 1). Among my nine respondents, only Jiro and Mary Joy have not been to Japan. However, Jiro’s father sends packages from Japan almost every month, and spends time with his family whenever he is in the Philippines. Mary Joy said that she does not know much about Japan after her mother stopped going there when she was three years old. She, however, gets her idea about Japan from her mother; to some extent, from her aunt’s and cousin’s stories; and from what she sees on TV. Her knowledge about Japan, however, seems to be quite limited to “strict police,” modern restaurants, high rate of suicides, and ghosts. She also has this notion that people her age are fond of “cute things” and are “really nice,” judging from the friends of her cousins.

Alternatively, Ayaka, Sayuri, and to some extent Mayumi, have spent a good part of their lives in Japan. Most of my respondents go to Japan for holidays. While all of them have something positive to say about Japan, their different experiences account for their different attitudes about going there. John recalled being happy with his “first snow experience” in Japan, but admitted that living there for about two years pushed him out of his “comfort zone.” His time in Japan was spent learning and gaining some proficiency (N2) [in Japanese Language Proficiency Exam, N2 indicates that one is proficient enough to read, write and speak Japanese, with N1 as the most difficult and highest level a non-native speaker can obtain] in Nihongo. Despite his linguistic facility, he admitted that he still could not tap his full potential in Japan because of the language and cultural barriers. He also

tried engaging in different kinds of jobs (*arubaito*), from teaching English to construction work, which “pushed his limits” and somehow created in him a distaste for going to Japan. Some of my respondents also shared experiences of discrimination in Japan because they are “half-Japanese.” For instance, Ayaka and Mayumi were bullied at school. For the rest of my respondents, however, Japan is a big holiday site. Most associate Japan with positive experiences and pleasant memories of eating great food, going to amusement parks, and shopping. For Hiroshi, Ayaka, Sayuri, and Mayumi, whose parent/s have been staying in Japan for the longest time, Japan means being with their family and friends; thus, they always look forward to traveling there.

It is apparent that even if my respondents are mostly based in the Philippines, they maintain transnational connections with Japan, albeit in varying degrees. This even applies to the case of Mary Joy, who has never been there. Phone calls, as well as social media networks such as Facebook and Skype enable the simultaneous contact between my respondents and their loved ones in Japan. This just shows the complex influence of the “multi-local life-world” to the individual’s identities, positioning the “individuals in the course of their everyday lives within and across each of their places of attachment or perceived belonging” (Vertovec 2001, 578).

### **Ways of Belonging**

After giving a general picture of my respondents’ lives in the Philippines, I will now focus on the nature of their identity and “belongingness” to a group and, in turn, to society. By using ways of belonging, I am referring to “practices that signal or enact an identity which demonstrates a conscious connection to a particular group.”<sup>11</sup> This discussion will be limited to the terms that they associate with being a child of Japanese and Filipino parents, and to their attitudes to organizations that assist Japanese-Filipino children.

Knowing “who you are” is an essential part of an individual’s existence. Our sense of identity reflects our life’s choices; the things we do; how we think; and how we behave or respond to different situations. As

“identity is relational, being constructed through relations of difference such as *us* and *them*” (Woodward 2002, xii), people have the tendency to assign names or labels to facilitate easier identification or differentiation. But in some cases, putting labels to things also creates division within a group or could lead to discrimination or stereotyping. This seems to be the case with the Japanese-Filipino children in the Philippines, as I will discuss below.

### *Group Identity*

It can be recalled that several terms refer to the children of Japanese-Filipino unions. In the case of those born in the 1980s and 1990s, the focus of my study, this constant redefinition (inclusion and exclusion of membership to a group) can be analysed in terms of the social factors affecting group dynamics. According to Ortner’s concept of (social) “power” and “agency,” (2006) both Japanese and Philippine societies (considering the individual’s transnational connections) exert some influence on the members of the Japanese-Filipino children as a group, which in turn leads to their constant redefining of “who I am/who we are.” This translates to one’s “agency” in a group and as an individual. At a macro-level, changes in laws or policies (i.e. the Nationality Law) warrant different reactions and actions from those directly affected by these changes. For instance, granting a chance to acquire Japanese nationality to those born out of wedlock can be good news for such. But for those whose parents are legally married, this revision somehow strips them of their former privilege of having Japanese nationality because now they share such opportunity to those born outside marriage. Before the revision, a “Japanese nationality” served as a “status symbol” of “legal children” of Japanese nationals, differentiating them from those born out of wedlock. This could be a reason why several terms have emerged, probably to associate or dissociate one group from the other. I now go back to the labels or terms used to refer to Japanese-Filipino children.

Before I mentioned some of the terms during the interview, I first asked the respondents which ones referring to children with Japanese

Filipino parents they are familiar with. They all had something to say about their preferred labels based on their perceptions of the different terms and their experiences. For instance, Sakura does not want to associate herself with the term *Japino* (a word that combines Japanese and *Pinoy* [Filipino]) since she has this impression that it is mainly used for “bastard children of former Filipina entertainers.” For Hiroshi, there seems to be an “imbalance” in the term, *Japino*, since it seems that the “Filipino” element is more recognizable than that of the Japanese. On the contrary, John sees “balance” in the term, saying that it has both Filipino and Japanese elements. The term *JFC* or *Japanese Filipino Children* received mixed reactions from my respondents. Some found it more descriptive and easier for the general public to understand, while others thought it “weird.” *Nikkeijin*<sup>12</sup> appeared quite amenable to most of my Philippine-based respondents since the term is in Japanese, and it has a less discriminatory sense than other terms. Nevertheless, for some, it still has a negative connotation. Yumiko, for example, considered *nikkeijin* discriminatory, asserting that Japanese are very particular about having “pure blood.” Some of my respondents also expressed a kind of detachment with the term, thinking that *nikkeijin* implies having only some “Japanese blood,” and that it does not necessarily entail being “half-Japanese.” This is the case with Sayuri who has lived most of her life in Japan. These perceptions mostly come from what they see in mass media (TV and the Internet) and from what they hear from people at school. Sayuri seems to be distinguishing herself from the “Philippine *nikkeijin*” that also includes third- or fourth-generation Japanese.

My respondents also introduced other terms for Japanese-Filipino children that they have encountered, including *Japino*y, *Japoks*, and *Fil-Jap* or *Jap-Fil*. Most of them do not really like these terms, except for *Fil-Jap*. Additionally, those who stayed longer in Japan told me that *hafu*<sup>13</sup> (technically the Japanese pronunciation of the English word *half* and written in *katakana*) was the usual label in Japan for Japanese-Filipino children like them. Ayaka prefers the term “double” or “mixed” instead

of “half,” since she feels that “half” seems discriminatory and connotes “incompleteness.” She also mentioned *kikoku shijo*,<sup>14</sup> which according to her is the term used for “Japanese who have returned from other countries”. *Kikoku shijo*, however, according to Podolsky’s<sup>15</sup> study (2008), refers mainly to [returnee] children of Japanese nationals who accompany their parents abroad because of the nature of their work i.e. military personnel, diplomat, missionary; the term does not apply to those with a half-Japanese ethnicity. *Kikoku shijo* presents a different context and problems than those of Japanese-Filipino children. Even though they are ethnically “pure Japanese,” *kikoku shijo* spend most of their lives abroad and have difficulty integrating to Japanese society once they return. Perhaps Ayaka shares the same sentiment and thus she could relate with the *kikoku shijo*. But still, some respondents expressed concern about [using] these labels, saying that these sometimes make them prone to stereotyping or discrimination. Some like Hiroshi and Jiro do not want any labels all; they prefer to be called either *Japanese* or *Filipino*.

All these suggest that an individual can relate to a group and at the same time avoid being identified with it. It is evident in my study that most of my respondents are wary about these labels because they fear being identified with other Japanese-Filipino children (abandoned or bastard children) or being classified as a son or daughter of a “Japayuki.” Culture<sup>16</sup> plays a part in the qualms of my respondents about labels. A number of my respondents talked about this “Filipino culture” of creating word plays and making funny names, which could be a factor in their hesitations to be labelled. There are also terms such as *Bisapon* (short for *Bisayang Hapon*), *Japoks*, and even *Jafake* that are used by some of their friends to tease them. Although most of these take the form of jokes, some of my respondents admitted that they are sometimes offended. Most of them would rather have those terms or categories be used in formal settings or academic papers than in daily interactions. This visibly reveals the danger of putting labels or categorizations to certain groups because instead of uniting them, it further creates a divide within the group.

### *Individual Identity/ies*

There appear to be three different ways how my respondents identified themselves. One group said that they are “more Filipino” (but for some a transition from being Japanese); another sees themselves as “more Japanese;” and the third group sees themselves as somewhere in the middle. “Filipinoness”, according to my respondents, is often associated with the following traits: tardiness, hospitality, having [extended] family bond and values, being adaptive, conservativeness, cheerfulness, [too] laxity, and even laziness. “Japaneseness,” on the other hand, is linked mostly to positive traits such as discipline, consciousness with time, industriousness, strictness, and [too] politeness, but it also includes monotony, stiffness, pride, and being [too] workaholic. I focused on three respondents, namely Sakura, Mary Joy, and Mayumi, the three whom I did a life history interview with, to have a deeper understanding of their identification process.

Practice Theory emphasizes the importance of “subjectivity as the basis of ‘agency’” in understanding the dialectical synthesis between the “structure” and the “agency.” *Agency* refers to some “specific desires and intentions within a matrix of subjectivity—of (culturally constituted) feelings, thoughts and meanings” (Ortner 2006, 110). How an individual affiliates his/herself to a country or a group depends on his/her position in society as an individual, which also affects his or her intentions and plans. It is important to look into the lives of each individual to understand where he or she is coming from, and why one identifies his/herself in a particular way. Ortner’s concept of the two forms of social embeddedness of agents is central to her “serious games” framework, and it serves as an excellent point of analysis. The first form of social embeddedness assumes that the “agent” (or the social actor) is always embedded in relations of solidarity. It is assumed that while social actors have “agency,” it is also impossible to imagine that the agent is “free” or is an unrestrained individual. An agent is “always embedded in relations of solidarity: family, friends, kin, spouses or partners, children, parents, teachers, allies, and so forth” (ibid. 130). I will focus on the lives of Mary Joy, Sakura, and Mayumi, specifically on their relationship with their parents, friends, and close colleagues.

As I have exemplified, my respondents express their sense of personal belongingness in different ways. Sakura positions herself in the middle of being Japanese and Filipino. It appears that the presence of her Japanese father and Filipina mother while she was growing up plays a crucial factor in her self-affiliation. She thinks that because she grew up having both of her parents around, she has learned two cultures (Filipino and Japanese). Sakura also attributes her learning English and Japanese at the same time to having both her parents around all her life. On the other hand, Mary Joy grew up without knowing her father. And her relationship with her mother is also strenuous. Although she had a “father figure,” her Papa Taishi (the Japanese boyfriend of her mother until Mary Joy was eight years old), he was often in Japan and Mary Joy got to be with him only during his annual visits to the Philippines. Mary Joy’s mother did not also teach her Japanese and this reinforced the superficiality of her interaction with her Papa Taishi, an interaction somehow confined to receiving gifts and money. Mary Joy grew up in an extended family where a number of her relatives have (had) relationships with Japanese men. Drawing mainly on stories of her relatives’ relationships with Japanese men, it appears that Mary Joy generally has a good impression of their Japanese partners. That is why she puts most of the blame<sup>17</sup> on her relatives when it comes to their strained relationships with their Japanese partners. Growing up in the company of her aunt, uncles, and cousins, she [said that she] has known a number of negative Filipino traits, such as “being lazy to the point of depending on one’s siblings to survive;” not exerting any effort to find work; always asking for money from others; not being fair, and so forth. These impressions were made against the relatively congenial experiences she had with the Japanese people she met. This could be indicative of her desire to identify with the Japanese more than with Filipinos.

Meanwhile, Mayumi’s relatively substantial exposure to both Filipino and Japanese society puts her in a special situation. Born and raised in Japan, she spent as a child a considerable time with her Japanese father (and his family) and her own mother. Sharing her recent experience

of choosing a Japanese nationality and renouncing her Filipino citizenship (the Philippines allows dual citizenship while Japan does not), she expressed her sentiments about “losing” her Filipino nationality, realizing that she has become “more Filipino.” She added that it felt odd that she is holding a Japanese passport while she does not speak good Japanese, and her life is right here in the Philippines. Mayumi’s expression of her being Filipino can also be seen against the background of what happened between her mother and father prior to their divorce. Seeing her father as “violent” and her mother as having had to make a lot of sacrifices to raise Mayumi, she obviously sided with her mother. Describing her father as “*probinsyano*,” “mama’s boy,” and not providing for their family’s financial needs can indicate her negative impressions of Japan and its people.

The respondents have different stories on relationships with friends and romantic partners. Sakura has a number of friends with mixed ethnicities, most of whom she met at school. She did not really think that she was “special” since there were a lot of people like her in school, Southville. But after she got into college, her closest friends were mostly Filipino, although she still sees her high school friends. Mary Joy has not had a lot of exposure to people of her age with mixed ethnicities. Despite that, she also has a few “half-Japanese” friends in addition to her Filipino ones. But among these two groups, she thinks she is more comfortable with her Japanese-Filipino friend in particular, whom she has known since elementary school and to whom she could tell almost anything. However, being with her “half-Japanese” friends sometimes makes her feel insecure, mainly because her friends are recognized by their Japanese father while she does not even know hers. That is why sometimes she feels that she cannot fit in. Mayumi’s friends, on the other hand, are mostly composed of Filipinos, with the exception of her childhood “half-Japanese” friend with whom she still communicates. Unlike Mary Joy, Mayumi thinks that she has a “deeper connection” with her Filipino friends. Mayumi reflected that this is possible because she is technically “alone” in the Philippines, devoting most of her time at school and getting close to her friends, whom she regards more as family. Her relationship with her “half-Japanese”

childhood friend, on the other hand, is now limited to online exchanges; and Mayumi admitted that sometimes they have to hurdle a language barrier because her friend does not know Tagalog very much while Mayumi is not very good in Japanese.

When it comes to romantic relationships, both Mary Joy and Mayumi have gone out with Japanese-Filipino children like them. Both of them talked of the “commonality” they share with their boyfriends, pointing mainly to their “half-Japanese” ancestry. Mary Joy, for example, was able to share with a former “half-Japanese” boyfriend the feeling of not knowing one’s father. Both of them also had the same problem of not fitting in with their respective mother’s new family. All of her other former boyfriends were Filipinos. The privilege of having private conversations in Japanese in the midst of non-Japanese speakers in the Philippines makes Mayumi’s relationship with her current half-Japanese boyfriend more intimate. Sakura, on the other hand, had two relationships in the past with a Korean (for less than a year) and a Taiwanese (for five years). She and her Taiwanese boyfriend decided to end the relationship when he migrated to the United States. Presently, she is dating a Filipino. She admitted that she used to have a bias against dating Filipinos because she did not find them attractive. Today, her prejudices are based more on one’s educational attainment, such as whether one went to college or not. But Sakura, Mayumi, and Mary Joy do not think that they choose their future partners based on their nationality or ethnicity. According to them, their attraction to a man would still depend on the kind of person he is.

Finally, Mayumi, Sakura, and Mary Joy have different experiences in schools in the Philippines. Of the three, only Mayumi went to school in both Japan and the Philippines. Her experiences in Japanese schools were generally pleasant, made up of interactions with teachers and schoolmates. Her being “half-Japanese” did not become an issue until she was in Grade Two, when her closest friends started to avoid her after learning that she is *hafu*. Upon moving to the Philippines, she did not meet a lot of Japanese or “half-Japanese” children at Christian Values School<sup>18</sup> in Cavite. But that made her feel “special” because the people

around her took extra interest in her whenever they learned that she is “half-Japanese.” There were more international students when she went to college in Mapua,<sup>19</sup> and here she met a number of “half-Japanese” students. Most importantly, school has become the center of her life in the Philippines, and she has become more active in school activities and organizations. One of the organizations she joined, a Christian group, introduced her to Christianity, a faith which she adheres to at present. Generally, Mayumi considers her life at school as fortunate because having a Japanese name somehow makes her stand out. People can remember her easily, and she gets special treatment when people assume that she does not speak Tagalog.

Mary Joy did not have a lot of foreign schoolmates in both the private and public schools she attended. Nonetheless, she often hid her Japanese ethnicity at school, fearing that people might ask about her father. Mary Joy went under the guise of being the daughter of a Chinese; it was a partial truth since her mother is “half-Chinese” and “half-Filipino.” Whenever people tried to point out her physical appearance, she would usually explain that her eyes and complexion are such because her mother is Chinese. Sometimes, just to cut the conversation short, she would plainly say that she is “pure” Filipino. She felt that she did not fit in at school most of the time, and this has led her to engage in delinquent behaviors just to be “cool” and also so that she could hang out with some of her schoolmates. Mary Joy did not talk a lot about her experiences in college. I could only assume that she did not really have a lot of friends then, especially since she had to quit school for a while because of family and financial problems and most of her batch mates may have already graduated ahead of her.

Sakura’s experience at school, she related, was rather “normal” since almost everyone in her school at Southville has mixed ethnicities. This is not a very usual situation in the Philippines. Sakura was popular in high school when the “F4 phenomenon”<sup>20</sup> swept the Philippines. At that time, the “Chinita look” was fashionable and Sakura had a Taiwanese boyfriend. Sakura recounted that she and her boyfriend were considered a “power couple” in high school since most of her schoolmates associated them

with the protagonists of the Taiwanese TV series. But Sakura also remembered arguing with her history teacher on the discussion about the Japanese occupation of the Philippines. In her life history, she elaborated on how she was torn between siding with the Japanese and sympathizing with the Filipinos for what they suffered. Consciously or unconsciously, Sakura tried to deal with the conflict by believing in one aspect of history: that those who did horrible things in the Philippines were not really Japanese but conscripted Korean soldiers. Historians have long interpreted this as propaganda of the Japanese government to offset the negative image of Japanese in history. Though it is true that there were non-Japanese conscripts, it is also wrong to suppose that there were not any Japanese soldiers from Japan during World War II.<sup>21</sup> In some way, Sakura used this information to help her reconcile her internal turmoil about belonging to both ethnicities.

Ortner sees the social actor as “always enmeshed within relations of power, inequality, and competition” (2006, 131), the second form of social embeddedness. In this connection, I focus on my respondents’ nationality, i.e. the passport that they hold. Six out of nine of my respondents hold Japanese passports, along with the paper from the Philippine government that recognizes the holder as a Filipino “citizen.” Japan’s Nationality Law operates on the principle of *jus sanguinis*, relying specifically on patrilineal descent. Thus, recognition of the Japanese father is a crucial factor for a child to acquire a Japanese nationality. In the Philippines, holding “dual citizenship” is allowed, and it is somehow viewed as a prestige. Japan, on the other hand, does not allow dual citizenship; one has to renounce one’s nationality if one wishes to have a Japanese one. However, holding a Japanese nationality does not translate to easier integration in Japanese society, even with the individual’s half-Japanese ethnicity. Zulueta (2011), in her study of Japanese (Okinawan)-Filipino Nisei, points to their “mixed parentage” and limited knowledge of Japanese language as among the factors that led them to be perceived as “foreign” despite being a Japanese national. This applies to Japanese-Filipino children as well, since most of them grew up in the Philippines, coupled only with occasional visits to

Japan that most hardly know the Japanese culture. Even so, most of my respondents chose Japanese nationality.

Following Ortner's discussion of power and agency, it can be interpreted that my respondents may just be "acting within relations of social inequality, asymmetry, and force" (2006, 139). Having a Japanese passport gives an individual not only easier entry to Japan (where it is considered hard to secure a visa for a Filipino) but also an opportunity to live or work there. In addition, travelling to foreign countries is a lot easier with a Japanese passport than with a Filipino one because the former carries certain privileges such as visa exemption in some countries. Most of my respondents admitted that this was a reason for choosing a Japanese passport. Affiliating one's self with Japan, at least legally speaking, also seems prestigious because it is considered a "First World" country, unlike the Philippines, which is a "developing" nation.

Based on the interactions of my respondents with other people, the idea of power and inequality could also account for why someone like Mary Joy would try to hide her Japanese ancestry, and yet take advantage of her being half-Japanese and go to Japan.<sup>22</sup> The hesitations among my respondents to pursue their lives or careers in Japan can also reflect the perceived inequality and competition that some of them experienced in Japan.

In addition, different circumstances and interactions with different peoples also affect how an individual presents himself or herself. In Sakura's case, whenever she is in Japan, she tries to look and behave more like the Japanese do. Mayumi, on the other hand, feels the need to somehow "tame" her being Japanese [when she is in the Philippines], especially in situations when she is prone to discrimination. Meanwhile, Mary Joy's "Japaneseness" is reinforced when she looks at her positive traits (that she attributes to her Japanese ancestry) but in most cases, she hides it to avoid bringing up her mother's background as an entertainer. This idea runs parallel to Woodward's idea of identity as historically specific; and can be seen as fluid, contingent, and changing over time (2002, xii). During my

interview, Sakura, Mary Joy, and Mayumi responded quite simply about their identity, their sense of belongingness. However, as they shared their life experiences, all seemed to have redefined their identity/ies as Japanese or Filipino or both. Their admission of belongingness to one ethnicity or their refusal at times to take sides depends on the situation and the people they are with. For example, some tend to shy away from their Japanese ethnicity when they are stereotyped as children of *Japayukis*, but when people compliment their excellence in math or drawing, their being Japanese comes to the fore.

After the interviews with the respondents, it became apparent that having some knowledge of and exposure to two cultures affects an individual's sense of belonging to society. My study shows that Japanese and Philippine societies have both influenced my subjects in varying degrees. It seems that the travel experiences of the respondents who shuttle between Japan and the Philippines affect their sense of belongingness. In Hayami's (2007) case study, she interprets the travel narratives of young Karen women from hills to cities as mobility between different fields of power. This mobility, she said, causes the individual to "objectify his/her own place of origin, and continue to question his/her own identity, both in terms of ethnicity and gender, in the process and webs of power" (ibid 254). Somerville's (2008) study of second-generation Indians living in Canada reveals that despite their Canadian citizenship and sense of inclusion within Canadian society, they maintain a connection to India through visits and constant communication with their friends and relatives. Sommerville calls this "transnational belonging." Treating the individual as part of a "transnational social field" makes clear the possibility of being incorporated in a new state while at the same time maintaining transnational attachments to a homeland because of one's simultaneity of connection (Levitt and Schiller 2004). This is evident in the case of Ayaka, who, despite living in Japan for a long time with her family, still considers herself as Filipino "on the inside."

Adding the factor of transnationality, where individuals "experience multiple loci and layers of power" (Levitt and Schiller 2004, 1013) suggests

how one can be further influenced and embedded in the different social relations of more than one state without even being physically there. This somehow explains why some of my respondents position themselves in the middle of being Japanese and Filipino because they feel that they have a connection to both Japan and the Philippines. Thus, the circle enclosing one's network is not fixed, and the boundaries between what is "Japanese" or "Filipino" is particularly also hard to mark out since an individual constantly redefines his/her identity. Following Giddens's idea of a (partially) "knowing" subject, Ortner emphasizes that the "subject" is never passive—an individual also acts on the world but is also acted upon. As Japanese-Filipino children, my respondents somewhat straddle two invisible lines (Japanese and Filipino). Going back to the discussion of agency, it is important to reiterate that it is always up to the individual to choose who he/she is or is not, but the choices will always be influenced by his/her complex web of relations with other social agents. How Japanese or Filipino (or both) they are depends a lot on the social structures that they constantly deal or negotiate with.

### **Conclusion**

This study explores the lives of the Philippine-based Japanese-Filipino children born in the 1980s and 1990s, and examines the different ways that they construct their identity and social location in Philippine society. My study revealed that my respondents enjoy a relatively better life in terms of socio-economic status and integration in Philippine society. Almost all of them attended private or international schools and premier universities, and most have been vocal of their relatively "easy life" here in the Philippines. The lives of my respondents also varied in terms of the different relationships they have with both their parents, on their upbringing, and their exposure to and attitude towards Japanese culture.

Using in-depth interviews and life history as a method, my study indicated that Japanese-Filipino children have various ways of constructing and viewing themselves, which vary according to different factors. As a

group, they expressed varying senses of identification to being a Japanese-Filipino child, mainly in response to the stereotypes and negative connotations of labels that refer to them. On an individual level, three distinct identifications came out from my interviews: those who consider themselves as “more Japanese;” those who see themselves more as “Filipino;” and those who refuse to choose between those two ethnicities and position themselves in the middle of being both Japanese and Filipino. Applying Practice Theory, particularly the concept of agency and an individual’s social embeddedness, my study has identified and analyzed the different factors that influence an individual’s identity construction. For this study, I focused on the dynamics of an individual with his/her family, friends, and romantic partners, as well as one’s school experiences. My study indicated that those who grew up with both their Japanese and Filipino parents for most of their life, as exemplified in Sakura’s life history, show a tendency to see themselves in the center of being Japanese and Filipino. For those who grew up without the presence of their mother and father (because of marital separation or long-distance relationships because the parents work in Japan), as in the case of Mayumi, who sees herself more as Filipino, the relationship with friends and her school experiences play bigger roles in identity construction. Mary Joy, who grew up not knowing her father and neglected by her mother, identifies herself more as Japanese mainly because her being “different” is always attributed by her family and friends to her being “half-Japanese.” I have also observed that it is quite common among my male respondents to identify themselves more as Filipino. This may indicate that gender also plays a significant role when it comes to identity construction.

The transnational connection of the individual was also considered, but one that needs to be explored further since it plays a crucial role to identity construction. As earlier studies (Vertovec 2001; Levitt and Schiller 2004) on transnationalism exemplify, transnational individuals form their identities out of multiple affiliations and belongingness to complex networks of peoples and places crosscutting national boundaries, influencing their gender, race, and class status.

Most importantly, the class factor appeared very prominent in my study. By filtering on the organization affiliation, I somehow also filtered the “class status” of Japanese-Filipino children. My study revealed that there seems to be a form of divide between those who are affiliated with organizations assisting Japanese-Filipino children and those who are not, and that class seems to be an important, if not the root cause of this division. My respondents’ view of those who are affiliated to such organizations somehow reflects their class belonging—that they do not need such organizations since they are “recognized” and are not in need of any (financial) assistance. Sakura exemplifies this when she said that her school mostly caters to “upper-middle class,” signalling her class affiliation. Class belonging, as demonstrated in this study, plays an important role in how an individual views oneself as well as others, influencing one’s sense of belongingness to a group and society. As far as the Japanese-Filipino children are concerned, the seeming divide within this category somehow proves that “ethnic and even racial categories were in fact crosscut by the class divide” (Ortner 2006, 69).

Finally, my study illustrated that how an individual crafts one’s self is influenced by different webs of relations with other people. Clearly, just because one is a Japanese-Filipino child does not instantly make one into a stereotype. In this regard, even if all of them are “half-Filipino” and “half-Japanese,” my respondents displayed different identity constructions and affiliations, and even different meanings of what it means to be Japanese and Filipino or something else. But considering that identity is fluid and changing over time, I also noticed the tendency of my respondents to constantly redefine their identity, despite affiliating one’s self to being Filipino or Japanese or even something else. It seemed that age also plays a role in identity construction since some of my respondents accounted that they used to consider themselves as more Japanese when they were young, but changed their views as they grew older. This hews to the phenomenological approach to life history, in which the way individual perceives or interprets things and events (of the past) might change as one gains more knowledge and experiences.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Citizenship “delineates the characters of a member’s rights and duties within the national polity” while nationality legally delineates the category of belonging without granting full citizenship rights” (Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick-Schiller. 2004. “Conceptualizing simultaneity: a transnational social field perspective on society.” *International Migration Review* 38(3): 1002–1039, 1019).
- <sup>2</sup> I use the term pertaining to the biological and cultural membership of an individual that is distinct from other groups of people.
- <sup>3</sup> She recounted just being fed kamote (sweet potato), having no electricity at home and moving out of their apartment for failing to pay the rent, because her father did not have a stable job.
- <sup>4</sup> Southville International School and Colleges is a private non-sectarian school with campuses located at Las Piñas, and Parañaque, Philippines. It claims to be the only international school in the Philippines that is recognized as an educational institution of international character, offering complete array of education from pre-school to College.
- <sup>5</sup> Jiro for instance said: “Pag alam din nila na may lahing foreigner ka they treat you well... ganun po yung tumatak sa kin na parang ginagamit ko rin minsan pag gusto ng good service” (If they [in the Philippines] know that you have foreign blood, they treat you well... that’s what stuck to me so sometimes I make use of it if I want a good service).
- <sup>6</sup> Karayuki-san refers to disparage Japanese women who were prostitutes in China from the end of 19th century to the early 20th century, from which Japayuki-san (Filipina entertainers in Japan) was derived from (Lieba Faier. 2009. *Intimate Encounters: Filipina migrants remake rural Japan*. Berkeley: University of California Press).
- <sup>7</sup> Ortner uses the term in line with Bourdieu, pointing out to “certain economic-cum-cultural locations defined within an objectivist perspective...” while at the same time as “an identity term that is organized primarily around an economic axis” (2006, 72).
- <sup>8</sup> The group was 83 percent Jewish, 11 percent were non-Jewish whites and 6 percent were African Americans.
- <sup>9</sup> See: Nobue Suzuki. 2011. “Inside the home: Power and negotiation in Filipina-Japanese Marriages”. In *International Marriages in the time of Globalization*, edited by Elli K. Hekkila, and Brenda S.A. Yeoh, 53–67. New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc.
- <sup>10</sup> The study rectifies the generalizations that pervade the literatures about the nature of an entertainer’s job in Japan, emphasizing that their job is more about “social and conversational intercourse, not social intercourse.” See: James N. Anderson and Nobuhiko Fuwa. 2006. “Filipina Encounters with Japan: Stories Beyond the Stereotype from a Pangasinan Barangay.” *Philippine Studies* 54 (1): 111–141.
- <sup>11</sup> In relation to “ways of being”, which refers to the actual social relations and practices that the individual engages in rather than the identities associate with their actions, (Levitt and Schiller, Conceptualizing simultaneity, 1010). I focused on ways of belonging since in-depth interviews (as a methodology) did not enable me to actually observe actual practices of my respondents.

- <sup>12</sup> For those who know *nikkeijin*, their general knowledge about the term is that it is used for all Japanese migrants and their descendants outside Japan and including also those who returned, not distinguishing whether they are from the pre-war or post-war period.
- <sup>13</sup> Mayumi however told me that *hafu* could also mean gay in Japan. Because of this nuance, people sometimes combine the word with the non-Japanese ethnicity of the person, i.e. “hafu-Firipinjin” in addressing half-Japanese individuals.
- <sup>14</sup> Literally means “children and women who returned to Japan.” Recently *kikoku shijo* is replaced by *kikoku sei* (students who returned to Japan) in most official documents pertaining to school documents and eligibility for entrance examinations.
- <sup>15</sup> For a thorough discussion of *Kikoku shijo*, see: Podolsky, Momo Kano. 2008. “Internationally mobile children: The Japanese *kikoku-shijo* experience reconsidered.” *Contemporary Society Bulletin*: 49-69. Kyoto Women’s University.
- <sup>16</sup> Culture is defined as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society” (Kottak 2002, 23)
- <sup>17</sup> Mary Joy related that her mother and some cousins were cheating on their respective Japanese partners even though they were kind and generous, so their Japanese partners left them.
- <sup>18</sup> A private-sectarian Christian school, under United Methodist School, located in Bacoor, Cavite. It caters to preschool up to secondary education.
- <sup>19</sup> Mapua is a private nonsectarian tertiary school in the Philippines with its campuses located in Manila and Makati.
- <sup>20</sup> F4 refers to the four leading male characters in Meteor Garden, a Taiwanese telenovela based on a Japanese manga *Hanayori Dango* (Boys over Flowers) that became a hit in the Philippines in 2002. The F4 are depicted as sons of rich families and are extremely handsome. The female protagonist sported what was later known as the “Chinita look,” composed of “almond-shaped” eyes, long black hair, and fair skin.
- <sup>21</sup> See: James L. McClain. 2002. *Japan: A Modern History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002).
- <sup>22</sup> For a focused discussion on Japanese ethnicity as genetic capital among JFC see: Seiger, Fiona-Katharina. “Genetic capital in claims for nationality: activist discourses on Japanese? Filipino Children in the Philippines.” Next Generation Global Workshop. Kyoto: Kyoto University, 2010. 20 December 2013. [https://www.gcoe-intimacy.jp/images/library/File/3rd\\_next-generation\\_ws/Paper/](https://www.gcoe-intimacy.jp/images/library/File/3rd_next-generation_ws/Paper/).

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