

**Filipina Encounters with Japan: Stories Beyond the Stereotype**  
**from a Pangasinan Barangay**

Nobuhiko Fuwa and James N. Anderson

*This article focuses on the unfolding lives of eight Filipinas from a barangay in Pangasinan who have worked as Overseas Performing Artists (OPAs) or are wives of Japanese men. Their life stories, as told during interviews conducted in the Philippines and in Japan between 1994 and 2004, were enhanced with information on their families collected through four decades of research since 1961. The article describes similarities and differences among the women as individuals and their strategies in dealing with the challenges of work and responses to the duality of cultural demands. These stories put to question some common but overgeneralized descriptions and suppositions about Filipina OPAs.*

Keywords: Filipinas, international migration, benefits of migration, life stories, Japan

Much has been written on the Filipino Overseas Performing Artists (OPAs), more commonly referred to as “entertainers.” The early literature in Japan consisted mainly of journalistic accounts of select groups of OPAs (e.g., Yamatani 1985; Matsui 1987), which was followed by works produced by academics (e.g., De Dios 1992; Ballescas 1993; Osteria 1994). Most of those early writings, by both journalists and academic authors, focus on what OPAs do while working in Japan. Much of this literature typically implies that a large proportion of the OPAs was forced into prostitution and that, even with such sacrifices, their economic gains were quite small. De Dios (1992) asserts, for example, “[i]n many cases...Filipina entertainers are immediately forced into prostitution as soon as they arrive,” and “it is very difficult for the entertainer to be able to pay her

debts or send money back home on the basis of her salary... simply because she can only work legally for six months. It is this situation of economic need that predisposes many to engage in prostitution” (De Dios 1992, 50). Ballescás (1993, 77, 111) similarly argues that “many contract workers [referring to OPAs] agree to slowly move towards more direct sexual activities” and “feel comfortable with such a set-up with the rationalization that every touch, kiss or even intercourse was just part of work done for the sake of the family left behind.” Together, these authors tend to portray an image of Filipina OPAs as passive and naïve victims. Similar lines of assertions have been repeated by Gonzales (1998, 48) and by the International Organization for Migration (1997). The latter report even equates the flow of OPAs to Japan with human “trafficking.” Of course, especially in the early period from the 1970s to the mid-1980s, there have been Filipinas who engaged in prostitution of their own volition or through force. While no hard statistics exist as to how many Filipinas in Japan are actually prostitutes, their numbers were not of the scale suggested by some authors in the early and subsequent literature. Japan’s Ministry of Justice report of undocumented Filipinas, for example, disclosed that, of those apprehended between 1987 and 1990, 87 percent were hostesses, 3.4 percent striptease performers, and 2.8 percent prostitutes (Morita and Sassen 1994, 159).<sup>1</sup>

In contrast, Osteria (1994, 42, 49, see also 32, 54–56), who interviewed a sample of 155 OPAs in Tokyo, reported that “the women felt that the benefits were great,” that “[m]ost of the respondents indicated their desire to return to or remain in Japan,” and that “the women felt confident in the new economic role that they had assumed in the family.” Here, the notion of equating OPAs with prostitutes is absent. Furthermore, while most Filipina OPAs serve as hostesses, in addition to their singing and dancing at clubs or bars,

the goal of those clubs and bars in Japan is typically *to sell drinks to clients and not sex*, as documented by Allison (1994, 1-5) and others (Anderson 1999, 61-62; Ballescas 1996, 37-38, 41; Buruma 1985, 77; Condon 1985, 247-50). There was conversation or social intercourse, not sexual intercourse.

Some recent writings cast further doubts about the simplified images of the OPAs as passive victims found in the earlier literature. Aguilar (1999), for example, articulates “the place of human agency” in his discussion of the wider contexts of international labor migration, including Filipina OPAs. Suzuki (2000a) describes how contradictory (but equally simplistic) images of Filipino OPAs as “slave-dolls” who are abused and “s/exploited,” on the one hand, and as “cunning scavengers” who “will do anything for greater material rewards,” on the other, have been popularized by the prevailing media in Japan. With a few exceptions (e.g., Suzuki 2002), most of the existing research on OPAs have been based on structured surveys, questionnaires, or brief interviews. Many “academic” observations are methodologically problematic, showing a tendency to rely uncritically on politically and morally charged activists’ accounts of Filipinas who sought help and were inclined to talk; on secondary materials; on many recycled journalists’ publications; and on speculative estimates of the number of apprehended workers and other variables (Suzuki n.d.).

To rectify the generalizations that pervade the literature, this article provides data on the lives of eight OPAs from Barangay Sisya in Pangasinan. It describes how their lives, and those of their families, have been dramatically changed by their work in Japan.<sup>2</sup> Our goal is to portray the wider context of the lives and the experiences of these women who have worked or married in Japan between 1984 and 2004.<sup>3</sup> By the 1980s a few

young Sisy women had migrated to Japan to work as OPAs. We began to follow the lives of these women and their families closely as their numbers in Japan grew in the 1990s. Our knowledge of their backgrounds and their households provided a rare opportunity to contextualize the depictions of their lives in Japan and at home.

This study is an offshoot of a long-term (forty-four year) research project on sociocultural and economic change in a large Pangasinan barangay, in the course of which we have collected a rich body of qualitative and quantitative data. The present research focus that we have pursued intensively since the 1970s concerns Sisy's mounting internal and international migration (Anderson 1975; Fuwa 1997, 1998, 1999, in press). We (mainly Fuwa) have collected personal accounts from the Sisy women in this study and their families for a decade. Their stories have provided us with data of unusual quality and depth. Although the sample is small, it fits well within Anderson's (1997, 1999, 2000) larger research sample of Filipina OPAs and wives of Japanese conducted in Japan since 1995.

Briefly, it is relevant to recall that, in the 1960s through the 1970s, the rapidly growing Philippine population (indicated, for example, by a 3.1 percent annual growth from 1965 to 1974) raised labor force growth, limited job opportunities, and dramatically increased rural to urban internal migration (World Bank 2005). Women outnumbered men in this migration. The capital-intensive pattern of Philippine industrialization from the 1950s through the 1970s spurred unemployment of an educated, relatively skilled labor force. Fewer good jobs existed for women than for men. Unemployment among the female labor force reached double digits in 1987 at 10.9 percent (World Bank 2005). The average earnings of an employed Filipina in service, production, and agriculture work

were less than two-fifths that of an employed Filipino, despite the higher number of Filipinas holding academic degrees.

Under these conditions, overseas employment became a major solution, and Sisyas was no exception in this regard.<sup>4</sup> Its population grew threefold since 1960, and numerous Sisyas men and women joined the overseas Filipino workforce during the late 1970s. After 1981, the highest proportions of migrant women were working in Southeast Asia, Taiwan, and Korea, with a few in Japan.

In addition to this broad context, the migration of Sisyas women must be understood in terms of Sisyas' long history of outmigration as a strategy for survival, greater economic security, and higher social status. In the next section, we discuss the acceleration and diversification of Sisyas international migration. We then provide an overview of an OPA's job and subsequently proceed to the core of this article: a description of the backgrounds and experiences as expressed by eight Sisyas women who have worked or who now live in Japan. We conclude with a discussion of the similarities and variations among the Sisyas women studied, and their implications for the common perceptions about OPAs.

### **Sisyas and Its Growing Global Diaspora**

Sisyas was established by migrants from Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur in the 1870s. Ilocanos and Pangasinenses from nearby towns followed. Four *sitios* (neighborhoods) emerged, differing in terms of ethnicity, and the mix of tenurial relations and occupations. Ilocandia, the original sitio, was 85 percent Ilocano-speaking by 1961-1962. Sitio East was 60 percent Ilocano, Center was 47 percent Ilocano, and the largest sitio, West, 25

percent Ilocano. Other residents were Pangasinan speakers.

Sisya residents have proven quick in recognizing and seizing economic opportunities that might provide them with greater economic security, whether these be internal to the barangay, within the Philippines, or internationally. In the late 1920s a number of men, mainly from Ilocandia and West, volunteered for work in the fields of Hawaii. Fourteen household heads had worked in Hawaii for between twenty and forty years. Members of thirteen other households found work in Guam after 1946, with their household heads remaining there between six months and ten years. Others migrated to the agricultural frontiers of Mindanao and Cagayan, and many worked in provincial cities or in Manila.

The movement of workers from Sisya to Europe and Saudi Arabia began in the 1960s. By 1971 higher numbers of Sisya household members had migrated to Hawaii and Guam (11), mainland U.S.A. (3), and Canada (2). The 1976 census documented a second Sisya woman in California, another in Canada, and four more in Europe. By 1981 the number of Sisyanos abroad totaled 44, the biggest increases being in the Middle East (16), Europe (10), and Southeast Asia (3). The 1994 census recorded a further explosion of outmigrants. Those in the U.S. jumped to 55 (35 in the mainland, 19 in Hawaii and Guam, and 1 in Palau); in Europe 22; in the Middle East 74; in Singapore, Hong Kong, and Malaysia 50; and in Japan 11, for a total of 212 (Figure 1). Of the 479 households in Sisya in 1994, 133 of them (28 percent) received support from family members working abroad. The growth of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) tapered off after the 1990s. Our 2001 census recorded 235 OFWs from a total 602 households, with a largely similar distribution across destination countries as found in 1994 (See Figure). Fuwa (1997, 4)

summarizes the international migration trends since 1981 as characterized by greater geographical diversity in destinations, increasing feminization of migrant flows, higher participation by lower-status Sisyanos, and an increase in the participation of off-springs as compared with household heads.

(FIGURE ENTERS AROUND HERE)

Relative to job prospects in the Philippines those abroad were reasonably available and much better paid. By 2000 the ratio between Japan's per capita GDP and that of the Philippines was 38 to 1 (World Bank 2005). In Japan, Filipinos found incomparable wage differentials. Between 1975 and 1990 Filipinos accounted for about 125,000 or 18 percent of documented foreign workers in Japan (Mori 1991). Japan's economic boom (up until around 1990), declining birthrate, shortage of younger workers, aging population, and rejection of menial jobs created labor shortages in small-scale manufacturing, construction, and some services (Nagayama 1996, 249–51). Since then an average of 66,500 new or returning Filipino contract workers, mostly OPAs, entered Japan annually. Perhaps one-third of that number also entered without documents or were overstaying. By 1999 documented Filipinos surpassed 144,000. Eighty-five percent of these were Filipinas, including 60,455 OPAs and 54,004 spouses and children of Japanese (Ministry of Justice 2000). Undocumented or overstaying Filipinos numbered about 40,000 (POEA 2002). Despite Japan's weaker economy, documented Filipino entrants reached 186,262 in January 2002; of them 132,155 (71 percent) were women (Ministry of Justice 2002). In turn, wives of Japanese numbered 65,647 or about half of all female entrants. A few thousands more were "trainees," house helpers, caretakers, or students. An estimated 36,000 undocumented and 30,000 visa overstayers remained,

despite an increasing threat of deportation.

In mid-March 2005, the Japanese government adopted a new immigration regulation that will have a profound impact on the flow of Filipina OPAs to Japan. In response to the U.S. State Department's Fourth Trafficking in Persons Report and its charge of "human trafficking" into Japan, the new regulation imposes strict requirements for Filipina OPAs. Initial reports suggest a drastic drop in the number of OPAs from 25,715 during the period 1 January to 14 March 2005 to 291 only during the period 15 March to 31 May 2005 (*Mainichi Shimbun*, 15 July 2005).

### **The OPA Job**

Based on our OPA cases from Sisya (note that the following description may or may not describe the entire industry and generally applies to the situation prior to the change in immigration regulations in March 2005),<sup>5</sup> an OPA typically obtains a six-month contract and a visa before entering Japan. Usually this is done through an agency that recruits Filipinas, who are often called "talents"; provides them with predeparture lessons on singing and dancing, but typically not the Japanese language; and places them in nightclubs or bars in various parts of Japan. Once a contract is made the agent advances the air ticket and the first month's salary with which the OPA buys personal necessities and clothes to be worn at work. Usually the rest of the salary (i.e., five months' worth) is paid upon the expiration of the contract. Salary deductions are made to cover the airfare and the cost of documentation (passport, visa, and so on). With these arrangements, unlike most other OFW cases, OPAs usually do not need to generate any cash prior to their job applications.



Since the salary is paid at the end of the contract period, a small amount to cover living expenses in Japan is provided. The OPAs are supplied with an apartment room, which they share with several—sometimes as many as a dozen—other OPAs. They are also given daily allowances for food other than rice (which is supplied for free) and other daily necessities that may cost around ¥3500 to ¥5000 (US\$35 to US\$50, roughly) per week.

In their workplaces (*o'mise*) scattered around Japan the OPAs perform a combination of functions as hostesses, singers, dancers, waitresses, and do other after-hours tasks such as washing dishes and cleaning. The main part of their job, however, is customer service: serving drinks, talking to them (thus, by necessity, they pick up the crucial Japanese language quickly), and singing with them along with the karaoke. Typical hours of work start at 6 PM or 7 PM and end at 1 AM or 2 AM. The OPAs usually have two to four days off from work per month.

The level of the salary they received during the 1990s ranged from US\$250 per month to over US\$1,000 per month. The salary level for a particular individual appears to depend mainly on her previous experiences. In addition to the salary, OPAs often earn tips and so-called “backs,” equaling 10 percent of food and drinks ordered by the customers they serve. If fortunate, this additional income may add up to ¥1,000 to ¥5,000 per day. Because their salary is withheld until the end of the contract, while they are in Japan remittances to kin in the Philippines are based on the daily earnings together with the daily cash allowances.

After returning to the Philippines at the end of a six-month contract, an OPA typically must wait another six months or so to prepare for the visa and the contract for

the next sojourn. Often they are required to take dancing and singing lessons by their recruiting agencies. They prepare to return to Japan as soon as the next visa and contract are obtained. Optimally, they repeat this cycle of six months in Japan followed by six months in the Philippines. As their skills (especially language proficiency) improve with the accumulation of experience, the salary in the second visit to Japan is significantly higher than that in the first, and it usually tends to rise every time they return to Japan.

### **Individual Stories of Sisyana OPAs**

Six of the twelve women from Sisyana who migrated to Japan as OPAs did so during the 1980s. The first went in 1983, a second in 1986, two in 1987, and two (plus a wife) in 1989. Two more OPAs and a bride of a Japanese man followed in the 1990s. After 2000 one more OPA and one (victimized) bride went to Japan. Among the Sisyana women were three sets of sisters. One set are first cousins of two other OPA migrants to Japan. All six are from Sitio Ilocandia. Another set of sisters are the first cousins of an OPA from Sitio West; one of them is the sister-in-law of one of the migrants from Ilocandia. The third set of sisters, from Sitio East, are unrelated to the aforementioned but are neighbors of the most recent OPA. The final migrant, a bride from Sitio Center, ended up briefly and involuntarily as an OPA. In what follows, we discuss the stories of eight of the twelve women from Sisyana based on our (repeated) interviews with the OPAs themselves as well as with their family members in Sisyana.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Julita and Virginia***

Julita is the second of seven children. She was born in 1967 in Manila. Her father (Jaime),

after working as a taxi driver in Manila, later worked as a family chauffeur. He moved his family to Sisy East in 1970, remaining all but a week-end a month in Manila. Relatively well off by local standards, the household used saved cash income to mortgage 1.5 hectares of land that were farmed by a tenant. Moreover, their eldest daughter attended the private high school in town. However, when Jaime died suddenly of a heart attack in 1981 at age 42, the lives of family members changed dramatically. In order to provide for the children's education in 1982 Jaime's only inherited land was sold for P20,000 to a former OFW in Saudi Arabia. The decline in family economic security was striking. About two years later Julita, then 16, having just graduated from high school, heard about work in Japan as an OPA. Julita was among the better educated and the highest status of the Sisy OPAs, and one of the youngest. Very attractive, talented, and gregarious, Julita easily passed the basic qualifications. She worked as an OPA for almost six years (1983 to 1989). According to her mother, however, she did not bring much money back to her family.

At one point toward the end of her contract a Japanese proposed marriage and when she left Japan, he promised to go to Sisy for their wedding. However, after the passage of a few months he wrote to call it off. This experience deeply disillusioned Julita about Japan and Japanese men. She chose not to return to Japan. Later on she married a Filipino seaman and has raised a family of several girls and one boy in Manila. She runs a transportation business (owning a taxi and a van) and has other sideline businesses. Occasionally, she recruits a "talent" (an OPA candidate) for a "promotions" company that trains and arranges employment for OPAs in Japan.

Julita's sister, Virginia, followed her sister's example of working in Japan. The

fifth child (third daughter) in the family, Virginia, after graduating from Sisya high school, went to Manila to enroll in college. Lacking money, she dropped out of college after a year; she was then 17. Virginia, residing with Julita, recalls that they could not get along well at the time. About the same time, friends who had worked as OPAs told her about how much “fun” it was to go to Japan. Realizing that no good job opportunities existed in the Philippines, Virginia was “convinced” to apply. She made her first trip as an OPA in December 1989 at age 18. Her initial monthly salary was about US\$350, the standard level for beginners. Significantly, her contract was arranged by the same recruiting agent, herself a former OPA and aunt of three other Sisya women. The workplace where Virginia was assigned happened to have many *yakuza* gangsters among their customers. Although she was never victimized by them, she witnessed fights in the bar among different *yakuza* factions. Due to this chaotic situation, the o’mise closed and Virginia and her colleagues’ contracts were terminated one month early, and they had to return home.

Understandably, this experience left her with a negative impression of Japan. She did not seek another contract as an OPA. Instead, she returned to school, pursuing computer training. Within a year after her first trip to Japan, however, her friends again “convinced her” to resume her OPA career. Virginia returned for the second time in January 1991, earning a monthly salary of US\$700. Subsequently, she followed the typical six-month cycle. During her second to fourth trips, Virginia returned to work in the same o’mise and obtained her contract directly (i.e., without using a recruiting agency and thus saving airfares), further increasing her salary, which for her third contract reached US\$850 and for her fourth US\$1,000. Unlike her elder sister Julita, Virginia

saved her supplementary income (such as food allowances and tips) besides sending monthly remittances (between US\$200 and US\$400) to her mother and siblings. When she is in the Philippines she usually stays with Julita in Manila, helping her manage the taxi business. As of 2004, although Virginia had not been back to Japan for three years, she said she was still willing to continue working as an OPA. Indeed, she was recently offered a contract with a monthly salary of US\$1,000, but she declined it because she thought that the salary level was “too low.” According to her niece, however, Virginia said that it was becoming increasingly difficult for her to pass an audition, and that she was, at age 34, becoming “too old” for work as an OPA.

Based on our 1994 census, there were six members in her household then: Julita’s and Virginia’s mother and five children. The first daughter (working in Taiwan as a domestic helper) and Julita were married. Because they had their own households they did not send any money to their mother. Their 26-year-old brother worked as a tricycle owner-driver with an estimated annual income of P25,000. Virginia, then aged 22, earned an estimated gross income of US\$ 7,800 (P195,000). Meanwhile, the second son, aged 23, was working in Saudi Arabia as a waiter with an estimated annual gross income of US\$4,800 (P120,000). With Virginia’s remittances, the total family income was P81,800, making it the 69th highest in income distribution among the 479 households in Sisya. Of the total income, roughly 57 percent came from Virginia. Without her contribution, the household income ranking would have dropped to 207th.

Where did Virginia’s earnings go? After Virginia’s second trip to Japan in 1991 and nearly ten years after the sale of her late father’s small, inherited land, the family expanded their residential lot by purchasing a next-door lot, and renovated their

house. The estimated value of the house in 1994 was roughly P150,000. It was filled with a range of household electrical appliances as well as the gift items she received from her customers, including two stereo radio cassette recorders and numerous stuffed animals. After Virginia's third trip in 1993, a motorcycle with a side car ("tricycle") was purchased for P75,000 (US\$3,000). In addition, the family had two children whose education Virginia's earnings were paying for; one in college (aged 20), the other in high school (aged 13). In addition, in 1997, Virginia's mother purchased the immediately adjacent lot and began construction of another large (two-storey) concrete house. As of our 2004 visit, the new house was almost completed.

Virginia's mother is very proud of her daughter. Virginia realizes that many villagers are envious of her family and suspicious about her work in Japan. She does not seem to care about the others' perceptions of her. Virginia certainly understands the potential dangers involved in working in Japan, having heard of a tragic case of forced prostitution, an OPA who committed suicide, and the dangers of yakuza activity.<sup>7</sup> Despite these potential dangers she feels that she is in control of her situation while in Japan. She is not interested in marrying a Japanese. Indeed, after her second trip a young Japanese man followed her to Sisyá to propose marriage. She did not feel ready for marriage and thus declined the offer. Based on her observations, Japanese men are seldom faithful to their wives, are always seeking younger Filipinas, and express no affection (*lumbing*). In her view, her work as an OPA was the best opportunity available to her.

### ***Maria***

In 1986 Maria was the second migrant from Sisyá ever to go to Japan. She was born in

1969 as the sixth among fourteen children (and the second daughter) of Renato, who hailed from another municipality in Pangasinan. By the time Maria was born the family had moved to Sisya, Maria's mother's home village, after disposing of a half hectare of farmland that Renato inherited from his father. A high school graduate, Renato drove a tricycle and later became a tenant farmer. One of Maria's elementary school teachers recalled Maria's school performance as "below average," that she was rather untidy in appearance, and that the family had a hard time providing her with enough cash to buy snacks at school.

After her third year at high school in Sisya, Maria went to Manila where she worked as a saleslady. There she learned from one of her relatives (her cousin Christine's aunt), a former OPA herself, about the opportunity of working as an OPA in Japan. About three months later she applied at the same Manila-based agency that had recruited her cousin's aunt. Although she admits enjoying dancing since she was very young, her main motivation for applying as an OPA was economic. Her cousin's aunt-cum-recruiter informed Maria about what she was getting into, coached her about how to behave and what to avoid, and described Japan and the Japanese. Having lived and worked in Manila, Maria had been exposed to a relatively sophisticated urban environment. Although her parents were very worried about their daughter's new adventure, in the end they did not object to her departure. Waiting for about one year following her application, Maria made her first trip to Japan in 1986 at age 17. Maria has been an OPA, and a very successful one, ever since.

One significant event during her OPA career was her relationship with a (married) Japanese man. During her third trip in 1988, a customer, then a 32-year-old

general manager of a Honda car dealer in western Japan, became enamored with her. According to Maria, the man had promised to marry her but their marriage had been delayed because the man kept telling her that there were still some “problems.” Eventually they had a child, to whom she gave birth in the Philippines in 1994. After the birth of their daughter, the man sent regular income support. The relationship ended about a year later, after which the remittances also stopped. According to Maria, the man remained married, and his wife told Maria and the man to end their relationship. Later in 2000, in response to Maria’s request, the Citizen’s Network for Japanese Filipino Children, a Japanese nongovernment organization (NGO) specializing in assisting Filipino-Japanese children contacted the father, and convinced him to resume sending support to Maria for their daughter’s education. He has sent monthly remittances of ¥30,000 to ¥40,000 (US\$300-US\$400) since early 2001.

After breaking up with the man, Maria married a Filipino seaman in 1999, and began a new family in Manila. She did not return to Japan during the period between 2000 and 2003 and appeared to have given up her career. Yet, she was again successful, at age 34, in obtaining OPA contracts for January-July 2003 and March-September 2004. Based on our recent interviews in 2003-2004, Maria’s husband is not pleased to have her continue working in Japan mainly because he is at sea about ten months of the year and, thus, is quite concerned about the fact that their daughter is left without a parent (his relatives look after the child). Despite this, Maria still seems determined to continue her career as long as possible. Meanwhile, her daughter with the Japanese man has been raised by Maria’s parents in Sisyua. Maria, who calls her almost every week, says that she wants to see more of her mother and wants to meet her father.



With every new contract and accumulated experience, Maria's salary has been raised. She earned a monthly salary of US\$1,150 during her contract in 1994. Assuming that the first month's salary is spent for necessary expenses (such as clothes) and another month's salary for the plane ticket, her salary amounted to a four-month total of US\$4,600 (or P115,000, at P25 to US\$1 in 1994). Since Renato's net farm income was about P10,000, Maria earned more than ten times her father's income. In addition, the baby's father sent remittances regularly as child support amounting to at least US\$1,000 (P25,000). Therefore, in 1994, the total family income was around P145,000, making Maria's (and her ex-boyfriend's) contribution accounting for about 97 percent of the family income. This annual income ranked the family at 17th of Sisya's 479 households in income distribution. Without Maria's and her boyfriend's contribution, the family would have ranked 381st.

The most visible sign of Maria's earnings is the residential lot and the house that were purchased in 1991. The residential lot cost P45,000 (US\$1,800), while the two-storey house (spacious by local standards) cost an estimated P350,000 (US\$14,000). Its major furnishings, in addition to couch, tables, chairs, beds, and a baby crib, include most major household electrical appliances. Moreover, Maria purchased one hectare of first-class rice land in Sisya in 1996, and a lot and house in Cavite in 1999. In addition, the family also bought agricultural machinery: a hand tractor and a water pump. Without her earnings, such a level of material well-being would have been unimaginable.

The fact that her former Japanese boyfriend has remitted monthly support for their daughter over the last four years has created a subtle conflict between Maria and her parents because Maria lives in Manila (when she is not in Japan as an OPA) while her

Filipino-Japanese daughter is being raised by Maria's parents in Sisya. Maria did not immediately reveal to her parents the resumption of remittances, fearing that they might waste money on current household expenses rather than save for the future needs of her daughter. Maria's parents, for their part, feel that they are entitled to the money intended as support for taking care of their granddaughter. They suspect that Maria might be withholding money for herself and her new family in Manila. Maria says that she now gives about P6,000 (about 25 percent) of the ¥40,000 monthly remittances to her parents and deposits much of the rest into a college plan at a bank.

Overall, Renato and his wife are happy that Maria became an OPA in Japan. In their living room are displayed three large, framed pictures of Maria in her job costumes. Maria is proud of her contribution to the household over the past eighteen years. Still, she once remarked that she would rather not let her younger sisters become OPAs. Moreover, Maria's overriding concern (whether in Japan or in Manila) is her first daughter, especially her future and her growing fixation about her father. As of 2004, her daughter had sent at least two letters addressed to her father, through the NGO, but he had not responded. Presently, Maria is seeking to obtain legal recognition (*ninchi*) of her first daughter by her father through the same NGO and its volunteer lawyers. Once his legal recognition is issued, it would become feasible for the daughter to obtain a visitor visa to travel to Japan.

### ***Christine***

Christine, Maria's first cousin,<sup>8</sup> was born in 1972, the first (of five) children of Isko, a tenant farmer with a half hectare of non-irrigated land. She first went to Japan as an OPA

in 1987 at age 15, the youngest of the Sisya group. Like Maria, Christine quit without finishing high school. At age 14 she had left Sisya for Manila and later moved to Angeles City where she stayed with her aunt. As previously noted, the aunt was herself an OPA in Japan who had married a Japanese “promoter.” Christine also heard about working in Japan from friends. She was most impressed by their description of Tokyo Disneyland. She recalled, “It sounded like a lot of fun to go to Japan!” Attractive, talented, charming, self-assured, yet *mahinhin* (“demure”), Christine was well suited for her work. Her parents, although worried about their daughter’s sojourn, did not object. By 1994, Christine had completed six trips to Japan. Her monthly salary during her sixth, in 1993, was US\$950. By 1998 she had made a total of nine trips. Assuming the use of two months’ salary for necessary expenses (clothes and plane ticket), Christine must have earned an estimated disposable annual income of roughly US\$3,800 (P95,000) in 1994. Isko’s annual income from his half hectare planted with mango and eggplant was reported as P24,400. He retained the entire amount, having mortgaged the land from the owner for P6,000 (US\$240). Without Christine’s earnings it would have been impossible for a tenant to loan cash to his landowner.

Even so, Christine’s impact as an OPA was not as impressive as Maria’s. The family house remains like most other tenant farmer’s. Like them, too, Isko does not own his house lot. Still, having electricity and appliances, such as television, video cassette recorder, and karaoke, is notable. Where else did Christine’s money go? According to her parents, Christine’s household support was limited compared to her earnings. Her contribution to household income in 1993 was perhaps roughly US\$500. Still, that salary was about four times her father’s gross farm income, making her support roughly half of

her father's gross revenue. The family's income was P36,900, ranking it 198th from the top in the village income distribution. Without Christine's contribution, it would have ranked 275th among the 479 families. What became of the rest of her earnings then? Christine purchased some lovely dresses in Japan, each costing about US\$300, that hang in a small closet in the house. Other than that, it appears that most of her earnings were spent on personal expenditures as well as on "party" expenses for her relatives and (early on) "friends" when she returned home.

Like others, Christine's main reason for working in Japan was the lack of economic opportunities in the Philippines. "If I had a choice, I would rather not work as a 'talent,' but there was nothing worthwhile to do in the Philippines," she said. On her first trip, she "was so frightened," but a Japanese who became a regular customer was "very thoughtful and kind" to her, which reassured her. On later trips, Christine found other such genuine Japanese friends. She also spoke of the intense competition (sometimes dirty tricks) among women in the workplace seeking "regular" customers whose drinks provide its profits. Once, she worked in southern Japan, where her boss was a member of a yakuza family who she said was very nice. He protected her and her multiethnic colleagues against his rough underlings. Concerning her Japanese customers generally, she said that typically they were punctual, generous (e.g., in giving tips and gifts), kept promises, and were helpful in times of need. But she also observed that many were unfaithful ("they want many girls"), were not at all demonstrative or loving (*hindi malambing*), were "very quick with their hands," and revealed their real selves only when they were drunk. At one point Christine had a Japanese boyfriend with whom she lived. This man, in an effort to get her to return to Japan, gave her many gifts (e.g., television,

rings, and a “bag of money”). She declined his offer. She told us repeatedly, “I would never marry a Japanese and live in Japan!” She said she would rather live in Sisy. Christine retired permanently from her OPA career in 1997, marrying a Filipino man and settling down in Angeles, Pampanga.

### ***Erlinda and Dalia***<sup>9</sup>

Erlinda and Dalia, also cousins of Maria and Christine, were born in 1968 and 1977, respectively, as the sixth and tenth of thirteen children of Domingo. Until he passed away in 1988 at age 55, Domingo had been a tenant farmer for most of his life, although he had once worked at a gold mine located near Baguio. After graduating from high school, Erlinda went to Manila and worked at her aunt’s bakery. About two years later, she applied for an OPA position (again through the same agency as Maria’s and Christine’s). Erlinda’s main reason for applying was to repay the family’s debts; a year before Erlinda’s first trip to Japan, Domingo had fallen ill of asthma and was hospitalized, incurring a family debt of P8,000 from a bank. Despite Domingo’s strong objections, Erlinda traveled to Japan in December 1987; she was then 20 years old. According to her mother (in 1994), during that first trip, Erlinda contributed at least P30,000 (US\$1,200) to her family, enabling them to repay the debt. Sadly, Domingo died in April 1988 before Erlinda’s return. His funeral expenses amounted to P5,000 (US\$200).

In 1989 Erlinda went to Japan a second time, earning US\$450 per month. Her mother remembers that she contributed about P6,000 monthly. During this trip, Erlinda met a Japanese man about her age and they decided to marry. After completing her contract, wedding celebrations were held in both Sisy and Japan.<sup>10</sup> Once in Japan, she

continued to send about P6,000 (US\$240) to P8,000 (US\$320) every other month. With the total household income of P50,500 (P42,000 from Erlinda, plus P8,500 farm income contributed by Erlinda's brother), in 1994 the family ranked 127th among Sisy's 479 households. Without Erlinda's remittances it would have been at the 461th place. In 1999 Erlinda bought a tricycle for P86,000 to start a family business in Sisy.

It has been thirteen years since Erlinda married and settled in Japan. She has three children. Erlinda stopped working as an OPA after marriage, but about four or five years ago she began working at a food processing factory. According to her, her husband became increasingly controlling, jealous, and sometimes abusive. He resents Erlinda's meetings with Filipino female friends at their various homes for karaoke. At one point in 2002, after a violent argument with her husband, Erlinda ran away and hid at a friend's house in a nearby city for a few days. When she returned, her husband apologized and, with the mediation of his cousin, agreed to allow Erlinda to go out with her friends "once a week." As of this writing (2005), their marriage seems to have stabilized somewhat.

Erlinda's migration to Japan led not only to steady remittances to her family. It also provided a stepping stone for the migration of her siblings. In April 1994, one of Erlinda's younger brothers went to Japan as a tourist. He found a job, illegally, as a construction laborer with Erlinda's husband's assistance. Later, Erlinda's sister, Dalia, married a Japanese man at the initiative of her mother and sister. When Erlinda and her husband visited Sisy in 1999, they brought along a friend of the husband who was interested in marrying a Filipina. He liked Dalia immediately upon meeting her, but at age 22 (he around 40), she was not interested in marriage. Determined, Erlinda and her mother pressured Dalia to marry him. Although Dalia resisted, the wedding was held in

June 1999. When Dalia first went to Japan after the wedding, she initially lived with her sister in order to learn Japanese. Subsequently, she lived with her husband and his parents. Despite her initial reluctance, Dalia appears to have adjusted to her new life in Japan extremely well, and appeared to be quite happy at the time of our interviews in 2004 and 2005. Erlinda once remarked that, after they married, Dalia and her husband “developed love” to such an extent that she “envied them.” Dalia now works in a noodle factory near her residence.

### ***Julia***

All of the OPAs from Sisya described so far had made their initial trips to Japan either in the 1980s or the early 1990s. There were no new OPAs from Sisya after 1994 until Julia made her first trip in 2001. She was born in 1980, the first of eight children of Anna and Julius, a tenant farmer. Julia had received a scholarship from the Department of Science and Technology to study a three-year computer course at the University of Baguio. After finishing the course she became an intern in Tarlac, but her subsequent work was not directly related to computers. Julia worked as a cashier at a shopping mall for over one year. About this time her mother saw an advertisement on television concerning recruitment of OPAs and urged Julia to apply. She and her younger sister, May, did so. Both took an audition and both passed. The parents told us that, although they were not concerned about Julia working in Japan, they wanted May to finish her engineering degree first. Accordingly, Julia went to Japan as an OPA in November 2001 (with a monthly salary of US\$350). She made her second trip in November 2002 (with a monthly salary of US\$400), and another trip in December 2003 (at US\$500 per month). During

her second trip a Japanese customer, who was much older than she was, proposed marriage; she also liked him until she discovered that he was married.

Julia said that her main reason for going to Japan was her inability to find a good permanent job in the Philippines. She well understands that work as an OPA is temporary and limited to a certain age, but considers working in Japan as only a “stepping stone.” Julia is optimistic about going to the U.S. and finding permanent work there. At the same time, she admits that she would not mind marrying a Japanese man as a means of securing the right to work and remain in Japan.

When Julia returned to Sisya at the end of her first trip to Japan, the family purchased a carabao worth P18,000. With her salary during her second trip, they purchased on installment a 400-square-meter residential lot worth P140,000. Julia’s earnings have also been used for her siblings’ education. As of 2004 their family house was the same small bamboo and nipa structure where they lived before Julia went to Japan, unlike most of the other OPA cases among whom house renovation has been a priority activity.

According to the mother, Julia is a very caring daughter who has taken good care of her younger siblings. Her sister, May, as of our interview in March 2004, was finishing her engineering degree. Although May was still interested in working in Japan, she intended first to search for a job in engineering. According to her, if she could not find a “good job,” then she would go to Japan to work as an OPA. Indeed, she seemed very interested to visit and experience life in Japan by working there. According to May, perhaps unsurprisingly, another younger sister is interested in working in Japan.



### *Perla*

Perla was born in 1976 as the fifth of eight children of Aurora and Saturnino. Her family is an established landowning family in Sisya. Saturnino has been an owner-farmer throughout his adult life. The family lives along Sisya's main street in a relatively modest house situated on a sizable lot (125 square meters). Perla's unexpected ordeal began at age 22 with a casual conversation with Asa, an old friend from Sisya who was helping his aunt. The aunt and her Japanese husband had a business involving arranging marriages between Japanese men and Filipino women for a sizable fee. One of their clients, Hiroshi, had paid the couple ¥1,000,000 to meet and marry a Filipina. His prearranged bride-to-be, it turned out, had a boyfriend and was not ready to marry. With the couple under pressure to find substitute candidates for Hiroshi, Asa asked Perla, "would you be interested to marry a Japanese guy?" Perla took it as a joke and replied, "Where is he? Show me." Asa took Perla to Manila where his aunt introduced Perla to Hiroshi. Hiroshi, aged 52 at the time, immediately liked Perla, while Perla was not at all prepared for marriage. After much persuasion by Asa and her aunt, Perla finally agreed to marry him.

When Perla's spousal visa for Japan was approved in 2000, Hiroshi came to visit Perla's family in Sisya to accompany her to Japan. However, when he arrived in Manila, a certain Mr. Yamada (also married to a Filipina and working for Asa's aunt) told Hiroshi that Perla's father was hospitalized and the family needed cash. Hiroshi, without knowing the situation and unable to speak Filipino or English, gave the cash he had brought for Perla's airfare to Japan to Perla's family. Now out of cash, Hiroshi returned to Japan alone with the understanding that he would remit Perla's airfare once he arrived in Japan and that Mr. Yamada would bring her to Japan.

Perla's fate, however, took a tragic turn after Yamada entered the picture. While he did accompany Perla from Manila to Narita, he maliciously informed Hiroshi of a wrong arrival date so that Hiroshi was not able to meet Perla at the airport. Yamada instead took Perla to his own residence and made her work as a housekeeper. According to Perla, during this time Yamada tried unsuccessfully to rape her. Shortly after this incident, Yamada "sold" her to a club to work as a hostess. Hiroshi, on his part, had searched in vain for Perla in Japan, while she was enduring her ordeal. Perla worked, with pay, as a hostess for several months but then, totally dispirited, returned to the Philippines with assistance from her Filipina coworkers.

When she arrived in Manila, one of those coworkers asked Perla to entrust her passport and spousal visa temporarily to her care. Unfortunately, Perla did; perhaps understandably, Perla had trusted that coworker, who assisted her to return to the Philippines after her time of ordeal in Japan. Unsurprisingly, the former coworker subsequently vanished with Perla's passport, a document of extremely high economic value. It turned out, as might be expected, that Perla's identity was stolen and assumed by someone else to enter Japan, a fact that was later confirmed by Hiroshi with the Japanese immigration authority. After Perla's documents had been used by another person, it became impossible for Japanese immigration authorities to issue Perla another visa. She was unable to enter Japan to join her husband.

In spite of the legal obstacle caused by Yamada's duplicity, Hiroshi continued to expend considerable efforts to bring Perla to Japan as his wife. He made several visits to Perla and her family in Sisya. He brought the case before Japanese immigration and police authorities who responded, however, with the position that as long as there was a

person with Perla's identity in Japan they would not be able to issue a visa to her. The only option for Perla to obtain another visa was for her to become pregnant by Hiroshi. During our interview with both of them in March 2001, she appeared amenable to this idea, but Hiroshi was reluctant since his plan at that point was for Perla to find work at a factory in Japan in order to accumulate significant savings before they had a child. Hiroshi's plan was to build a nice house for her family in Sisya with the savings. In addition, Hiroshi appeared troubled by doubts about what really happened to Perla in Japan. Was the attempted rape by Yamada really unsuccessful? Why would she turn over her passport to another person? After our interview with the couple in 2001, the situation seemed to have reached a stalemate as there was no prospect of Perla ever obtaining a new visa.

Our interview with Perla in June 2003 revealed that Perla and Hiroshi had given up the fight. He sent her a divorce paper for her signature. Initially, she had demanded some money before signing it, but Hiroshi did not give any definitive response. Around this time, she was introduced by friends to "Consul Suzuki," the "Honorary" Consul General of Japan, to act as a mediator.<sup>11</sup> Finally, Perla signed the divorce paper in December 2003; she told Consul Suzuki that she just wanted closure to the entire painful matter and did not need any money anymore. Despite her seven-year long ordeal, Perla still appeared interested in marrying a Japanese. There seems to be a good possibility that Consul Suzuki could find Perla a Japanese husband. Perla told us also that she did not want to marry a Filipino because they were "abusive and irresponsible." Another reason why she might not marry a Filipino, according to her, was that her father was "very strict" and men in the village were also "afraid to approach her."

In sharp contrast to the preceding cases, Perla worked for only a few months, involuntarily, as an OPA during her stay in Japan. Her seven-year ordeal brought her and her family much sorrow and little economic gain. Yet, she and her family are still hopeful that eventually she will marry a Japanese man. Before Hiroshi reluctantly asked for a divorce, Perla's parents still approved of the idea of her marriage to Hiroshi (who had promised them a large house in Sisya).

### **Broad Patterns and Interpretations**

There are three distinct groups among ten Sisya OPAs (excluding Perla and Dalia): one in Sitio Ilocandia and Sitio Center (Maria, Christine, Erlinda, and Elizabeth); another in Sitio East (Julita, Virginia, and Julia); and in Sitio West (Margarita and Myra). The first two groups knew each other somewhat before becoming OPAs because they shared the same age cohort and went to school together. The West group existed separately from the others until Margarita married Elizabeth's brother after they both had made trips to Japan independently. Interestingly, families of Sisya OPAs have no connection with earlier international migrants to Hawaii in the 1920s or 1930s, or to Europe and Asia in the 1970s. Most of them were the first in their families to go abroad.

The commonalities and variations among our OPA cases discussed in this section do not apply to the cases of Perla and Delia, who were not recruited as OPAs. Both Perla and Delia went to Japan as wives of Japanese men whom they met in the Philippines, although Perla did end up working involuntarily as an OPA for a brief period. Perla's tragic case underscores the risks and the potential vulnerabilities involved in being international migrants generally.

A number of commonalities among Sisyana OPAs run counter to often-made characterizations of Filipina OPAs in Japan. These include the following:

1. As far as we can determine, none of Sisyana's OPAs engaged in prostitution or any other facet of the Japanese sex industry. None had worked earlier in the Philippine "hospitality" industry either. None was misled by the agencies that placed them. None was uninformed or misinformed about the work. They all understood what they were undertaking and made their decision on their own.

2. Although two "overstayed," all Sisyana OPAs entered Japan with valid visas. All had made more than one trip, returning again to Japan on their own volition.

3. The OPAs' monthly salary levels were essentially uniform, i.e., beginning at US\$350 and eventually rising to US\$1,000 or US\$1,200 as they gained experience. Salaries from a sojourn of six months generally exceeded by at least ten times each of the OPA's annual family income. As a result, although their contributions varied, they and their families gained enormous economic benefit from their work in Japan.

4. No Sisyana OPA was trafficked or subjected to violence, rape, or forced prostitution, as is often claimed in the literature (e.g., IOM 1997). All had regular days off (if only a few days per month), were relatively free to come and go from their apartments, and were able to avoid or deal with potentially serious problems, although two knew of abuse of other workers. None used drugs as is often attributed to OPAs.

5. All of Sisyana's OPAs have shown remarkable adaptability—in language learning, adjustment to diet, lifeways, and so on—to the entirely foreign culture. They accommodated well to the difficulties and challenges they continually faced.

6. The Sisyana OPAs all came from relatively low social status families. Most

fathers were tenant farmers or marginally employed. An OPA's parental education level was typically low.

7. Most of Sisy's OPAs were of early birth order and had younger siblings for whom they were expected to provide educational support. Most had a previous experience leading an urban life.

8. All Sisyana OPAs appear to share certain physical and personality traits that are considered to be "attractive" to those Japanese men who frequent the "Philippine pubs" where OPAs work. They are slim, of light complexion, well proportioned, and have congenial personalities, i.e., are sociable, cordial, conversational, and generally enjoyable to be around. These personal characteristics appear to be among the main criteria for OPA recruitment.

9. Although OPAs have been depicted as "usually...disoriented and dislocated" (Beltran et al. 1996, 24) and having difficulty reintegrating on their return, no Sisyana OPA (excepting Perla) has experienced these or other negative personal changes, although all have faced stigmatization to varying degrees.

At the same time, there are also notable variations among Sisy's OPAs:

1. Although there was clear recognition among all OPAs in the study that few meaningful economic opportunities existed for them in the Philippines, the specific event that triggered the application for an OPA job varied. In five cases the decision was prompted by a family crisis, such as the death of the father or separation or abandonment by a husband. In the remaining eight cases, however, no such family crisis event preceded the decision to become an OPA.

2. The educational backgrounds of the Sisyana OPAs varied. Most are high

school graduates or late high school dropouts. A few had begun tertiary-level education before encountering economic difficulties. One was a college graduate who had received a government scholarship.

3. Although salary levels were basically uniform for all OPAs, there was significant variation in the amounts of monetary contributions made to the parental households. The share of an OPA's income contribution to the households ranged from about 10 percent to as much as 70 percent.

4. The use of OPA monetary contributions to household income also differed. While most households spent at least some of those incomes on house renovation and the purchase of household appliances, some used more income for productive purposes (e.g., starting a *sari-sari* store, a tricycle business, buying agricultural land or machinery, and education), while others used more income on nonproductive assets (purchase of a residential lot) or on consumption.

5. Their experiences regarding marriage (or relationships) and child bearing also varied widely. Two of Sisy's OPAs either married a Japanese or had a child with one, while three others had relationships with Filipino men (and two had a child) while in Japan. Four others (one after ending a relationship with a Japanese man) married Filipino men in the Philippines. Two of those who married Filipino husbands ended their OPA career, but two others have continued this occupation.

6. Although all Sisyana OPAs made more than one trip to Japan, two of them ended their career relatively early (while in their early 20s) and settled down in the Philippines. In contrast, four others, two of whom made a "comeback" after a long interval, seem determined to continue the career for as long as possible. While the initial

motivation for becoming an OPA was invariably economic, once they became familiar with their new context they became attached to living and working in Japan, which made them want to return to Japan. However, the extent to which they developed such attachments differed among the OPAs.

It is important to appreciate that there have been significant changes surrounding the OPA profession over the past two decades. Advances in telecommunications (especially cellular phones) have made staying in touch with families in Sisy as well as with Filipino culture via satellite television it increasingly easy. Moreover, Japan's expanding Filipino population and the development of local networks in various parts of the country (Anderson 2000, 2004) have provided greater sources of social support. These changes make dislocation from the homeland less acutely felt. However, by early this decade the long recession in Japan finally began to reduce seriously the number of jobs available for OPAs. It increased pressure on OPAs to bring in customers (typically by placing frequent phone calls before business hours), and created greater pressure for salary cuts and the possibility of premature contract termination.

At the same time, notable changes were taking place on the Philippine side. The depreciation of the peso against the US dollar has made working abroad even more attractive than before. The recruitment processes for OPAs have become relatively more organized and closely regulated in the 1990s following some tragic cases involving OPAs. Many of the Sisyana OPAs say that, after the much publicized tragedy of the "Maricris Sioson case" in 1991 (see Palma-Beltran 1992), the regulations have tightened for OPAs younger than 23 years old and the average age of OPAs going to Japan has risen somewhat, although many of the OPAs are younger than the official lower limit of 23



because of fabricated documents. In addition, the skill requirements for “talents” have been more strictly formalized, and predeparture training has been toughened. For longtime OPAs, the dependency of (adult) family members in the Philippines on remittances has continued to increase.

Finally, while there was no new OPA from Sisya after the mid-1990s until 2001, we have heard over the last several years about stories and rumors of other young Sisyanas who are eager to work as OPAs. Some must have actually applied but were not successful, and others apparently gave up before taking an audition. In one such case, the father of the would-be OPA is a longtime village councilman, and thus from a relatively high social status, unlike other cases. His daughter, although exemplifying physical features that are typically sought after by Japanese customers, was perhaps “too shy” to become an OPA. This suggests that becoming an OPA has become an attractive option for a larger number of young women, but that the attributes for success requires the combination of traits, including acceptable physical features, appropriate personality, and ample courage.

## **Conclusion**

In this article we are not arguing that the work of Filipina OPAs is desirable, nor do we deny the potential dangers an OPA often faces. We recognize the tremendous sacrifices made by OPAs. We lament the tragic cases, which in our view involve a relatively small number of OPAs. We note that entering an arranged marriage may sometimes be more risky than working as an OPA. We argue, however, that our information confirms that, given the circumstances, the work of OPAs is not necessarily immoral, demeaning, or

improper work. It has benefited their families as well as their own lives. OPAs may sometimes be pressured by family members or the family situation. Their experiences as OPAs have created dilemmas and raised new difficulties. Yet, their voices and their stories are rather diverse and deserve to be heard rather than drowned by very broad generalizations that seem to predominate in the literature.

### **Notes**

We thank the participants in the Seventh International Conference on Philippine Studies (ICOPHIL), held at Leiden, The Netherlands, in June 2004, an anonymous referee, the editor of this journal, and Nobue Suzuki for comments and discussions.

1. Suzuki (2000, 155) also notes that “[b]y the late 1980s...prostitution among Filipinas had declined significantly, to the extent that reporters had to ‘look for’ such prostitutes.”
2. The village name and individual names mentioned in our discussion are pseudonyms.
3. This paper extends an earlier paper (Fuwa 1999) based on information up to the mid-1990s. Here, we resume the life stories of our sample of OPAs from interviews carried out up to 2004. See also Anderson 1999.
4. See Aguilar (2003), for example, for a discussion of Filipino OFWs in a larger historical, as well as theoretical, context.
5. How the situation has changed since 2005 will need to be investigated in our future work.
6. While we focus on eight individuals in order to conserve space, each case is quite unique. The individual cases omitted here can be found in our longer working paper

version, available from the authors. In the discussion that follows, unless otherwise noted, the information was obtained by personal interviews with the OPAs themselves. Unless otherwise noted, the interviews were conducted at their own houses in Sisya. In most cases the interviews were in Japanese, occasionally in Ilocano or Pangasinan, assisted by local interpreters.

7. Her comment on the yakuza: “Not every yakuza is a bad person; some are nice some are not. Some of them are quite dangerous indeed.”

8. Maria’s mother is Christine’s father.

9. Our interview was conducted with the mother in Sisya in 1994, 1996, 2001, 2003, and 2004. We also interviewed Erlinda and Dalia in Japan in 2001, 2004, and 2005.

10. Erlinda’s mother attended both wedding ceremonies, and she is possibly the only Sisvano who has been to Japan as a pure visitor, which is totally unthinkable for a wife of a sharecropping tenant farmer (or almost anyone in the village for that matter).

11. Mr. Suzuki was born in the Philippines as a son of a Japanese immigrant and was given this title by the Japanese government. A private citizen, he is well known among the Japanese in the Philippines, runs a training school for Japanese immigrants in the Philippines, and is actively involved in intermediary roles in various cases such as the one of Perla here.

## References

- Aguilar, Filomeno V. 1999. Ritual passage and the reconstruction of selfhood in international labour migration. *Sojourn* 14(1): 98–139.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2003. Global migrations, old forms of labor, and new transborder class relations. *Southeast Asian Studies* 41(2): 137–61.
- Allison, Anne 1994. *Nightwork: Sexuality, pleasure, and corporate masculinity in a Tokyo hostess club*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Anderson, James N. 1975. Social strategies in population change: Village data from central Luzon. In *Population and development in Southeast Asia*, ed. John F. Kantner and Lee McCaffrey, 145–72. Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1997. Creating a difference at home and abroad: Filipina “entertainers” in Japan. Paper presented at the Third European Conference on Philippines Studies, 27-29 April, Aix-en-Provence, France.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1999. Filipina migration to Japan: Hostesses, house helpers, and homemakers. *Filipinas* 33: 57–74.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2000. The diaspora to Japan at the millennium: A status report. Paper presented at the Sixth International Philippine Studies Conference, 10–14 July, Quezon City.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2004. Filipinos in Japan. In *Encyclopedia of diasporas*, vol. 2, ed. Melvin Ember, Carol Ember, and Ian Skoggard, 108–18. New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.
- Ballescás, Maria Rosario Piquero. 1993. *Filipino entertainers in Japan: An introduction*. Quezon City: Foundation for Nationalist Studies.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1996. The expanding D’s and the Filipino women in Japan. In *International female migration and Japan: Networking, settlement, and human rights*, 29–50. Tokyo: International Peace Research Institute, Meiji Gakuin University.
- Beltran, Ruby P., Elena L. Samonte, and Sr. Lita Walker, RSCJ. 1996. Filipino women migrant workers: Effects on family life and challenges for intervention. In *Filipino women migrant workers: At the crossroads and beyond Beijing*, ed. Ruby P. Beltran and G. R. Christina Rodriguez, 15-45. Quezon City: Giraffe Books.
- Buruma, Ian. 1985. *Behind the mask: On sexual demons, sacred mothers, tranvestites, gangsters, drifters, and other Japanese cultural heroes*. New York: New American Library.

- Condon, Jane. 1985. *Half a step behind: Japanese women today*. Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle.
- De Dios, Aurora Javate. 1992. Japayuki-san: Filipinas at risk. In *Filipino women overseas contract workers: At what cost?*, ed. Mary Ruby Palma-Beltran and Aurora Javate de Dios, 39–58. Manila: Goodwill Training.
- Fuwa, Nobuhiko. 1997. International migration in Sisya. Unpublished manuscript
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1998. Social stratification and mobility in a Pangasinan barrio, 1962–1994. *Filipinas* 26:33–66.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1999. Filipino “entertainers” in Japan. *Philippine Studies* 47:319–50.
- \_\_\_\_\_. In press. Pathways out of rural poverty: A case study in socio-economic mobility in the rural Philippines. *Cambridge Journal of Economics*.
- Gonzales, Joaquin L. III. 1998. *Philippine labour migration: Critical dimensions of public policy*. Manila: De La Salle University Press.
- Herbert, Wolfgang. 1996. *Foreign workers and law enforcement in Japan*. New York: Kegan Paul International.
- International Organization of Migration (IOM). 1997. *Trafficking in women to Japan for sexual exploitation: A survey of the case of Filipino women*. Geneva: IOM.
- Matsui, Yayori. 1987. *Women's Asia*. London: Zed Books.
- Morita, Kiriho and Saskia Sassen. 1994. The new illegal immigration in Japan, 1980–1992. *International Migration Review* 28(1): 153–63.
- Nagayama, Toshikazu. 1996. Foreign workers recruiting policies in Japan. *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 5(2–3): 241–64.
- Osteria, Trinidad S. 1994 *Filipino female labor migration to Japan: Economic causes and consequences*. Manila: De La Salle University Press.
- Palma-Beltran, Mary Ruby, and Aurora Javate de Dios. 1992. *Filipino women overseas contract workers: At what cost?* Manila: Goodwill Training.
- Suzuki, Nobue. 2000. Between two shores: Transnational projects and Filipina wives in/from Japan. *Women's Studies International Forum* 23(4): 431–44.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2000a. Women imagined, women imaging: Re/presentations of Filipinas in Japan since the 1980s. *US-Japan Women's Journal English Supplement* 19:142–75.

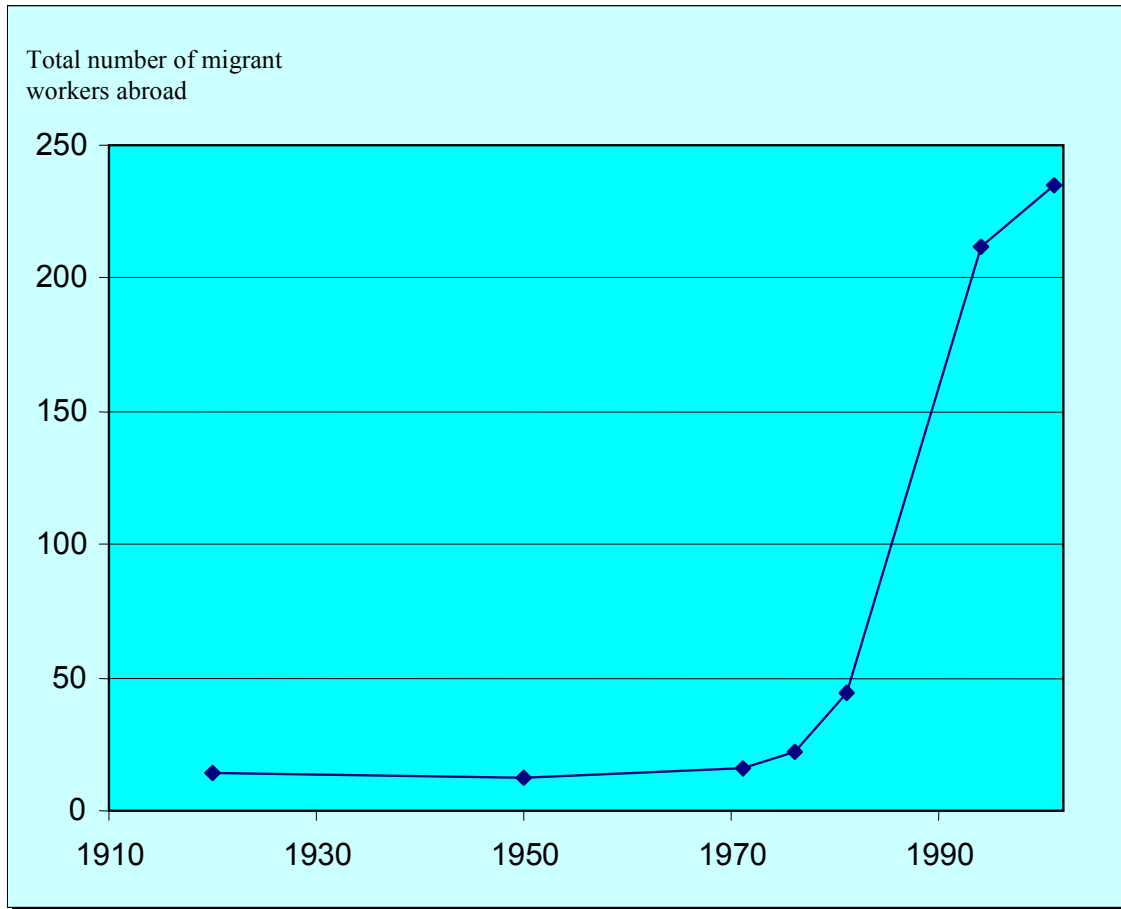
\_\_\_\_\_. 2002. Gendered surveillance and sexual violence in Filipina pre-migration experiences to Japan. In *Gender politics in the Asia-Pacific region*, ed. Brenda S. A. Yeoh, Peggy Teo, and Shirlena Huang, 99–119. London: Routledge.

\_\_\_\_\_. N.d. “Japayuki,” or, Spectacle-libidinal commodities for the transnational middle-class. *Vagina economy: Philippine cinema, sex and globalization in post-Marcos, post-Brocka era*, ed. Roland Tolentino.

World Bank 2005. *World development indicators 2005*. Internet document, <http://devdata.worldbank.org/data-query/>, accessed May 1, 2006.

Yamatani, Tetsuo. 1985. *Japayukisan (the Japan-bound)*. Tokyo: Joho Center Shuppanyoku.

Figure. **Sisyano Migrant Workers Abroad**



Source: Sisyano census data collected by the authors in 1971, 1976, 1981, 1994, and 2000; data prior to 1971 are from Pangasinan Provincial decennial censuses.