

**A Note on the Filipino ‘Entertainers’ in Japan:**

**A View from a Sending Village\***

by

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## 1. Introduction

There has been a small literature on the ‘entertainers’ in Japan who come from Southeast Asian countries, such as the Philippines and Thailand<sup>1</sup>. Some are written by journalists (e.g., Yamatani) and others are written mainly by academicians (e. g., Osteria, Palma-Beltran). They differ widely in their approaches (e. g., collection of personal stories vs. structured surveys) and in the main messages that are intended to be conveyed. In the great majority of these studies the information is collected mainly in Japan and the main focus is what they do while they work in Japan.

This essay will take a look at this phenomenon from an originating village’s point of view. The main focus here are: Why and how do they become ‘entertainers’? What do they do with the money they earn back home? How do the other villagers see them? and What is special, if any, about the ‘entertainers’ in Japan compared to other international migrants in other occupations (such as house maids)? We will rely on a small number of life histories drawn from a single village in Pangasinan Province.

There is a long history of international migrants or Overseas Contract Workers (OCW)<sup>2</sup> in our study village in Pangasinan Province, Sisya; it started as farm laborers recruited from Guam and Hawaii in the early twentieth century. James N. Anderson, based on his fieldwork in Sisya, argues that the villagers have been well prepared for the expanding opportunities overseas in a way that Tagalogs never were throughout its entire

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, this phenomenon of foreign ‘entertainers’ in Japan started with Korean women. Then followed the Taiwanese. More recently, they are mostly from Thailand and the Philippines. What being an ‘entertainer’ means in the present context will be discussed in the section two.

<sup>2</sup>We will use the words international migration (migrants) and Overseas Contract Workers interchangeably.

village history<sup>3</sup>; the village was initially formed by Ilocano migrants from Ilocos Norte as well as (a little later) Pangasinensis in the late nineteenth century, and once the village was populated it kept producing out-migrants toward the frontier provinces, such as Mindanao. Since the 1970s the destination of the OCWs from Sisya diversified into Europe, North America, the Middle East, and East and Southeast Asia. Especially since the late 1970s, the number of OCWs from the Philippines in general exploded. Among such trends, the female ‘entertainers’ in Japan are a rather small minority in Sisya. However, they appear to highlight major characteristics of the more recent OCWs in general; that is, the feminization of international migration and the trade off between the (short-term) gain in income and the (potential and realized) costs and risks involved in sending an OCW from a rural household. Therefore, an examination of this small minority of OCWs may reveal some implications of a greater generality and applicability towards other categories of OCWs.

The next section gives a brief description of the ‘entertainer’ business in Japan. Section 3 presents individual cases found in the village and contrasts each case with one another. Section 4 discusses the implications of our cases. And Section 5 concludes.

## **2. The Sisyoano ‘Entertainers’ in Japan: A Brief Overview**

In this section we will briefly discuss the ‘entertainers’ in Japan as an occupation as observed in our village<sup>4</sup>. There are major differences between the ‘entertainers’ who enter

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<sup>3</sup>Due to a personal conversation with James Anderson. Also see Anderson (1963) and (1975).

<sup>4</sup>These ‘entertainers’ are often referred to as *Japayuki(-san)* in both Japan and the Philippines. The term *Japayuki(-san)* in Japanese literally means “(Ms.) those who go to Japan.” While it is not clear who started to use this term, this clearly derives from the Japanese word “*Karayuki-san* (Ms. those who go to China),” which refers to those young woman from rural Japan who went to East and Southeast Asia to serve as prostitutes during the pre-war period. While the word *Japayuki* is commonly used in popular media, it appears to have a rather derogatory connotation (perhaps more so in

Japan with legitimate working visas and those who enter as tourists and work illegally. Since all the cases found in our village belong to the former group, the description of this section also focuses solely on that group<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, while among the former group various arrangements regarding the level and the way of payment, pre-departure procedures and other particulars may be possible, the following description is based on the cases observed in Sisya, which may or may not be representative of other cases of legal Filipino ‘entertainers’ from other parts of the Philippines.

Typically, an ‘entertainer’ obtains a six month contract and a visa before entering Japan. Usually this is done through a recruiting agency who recruits Filipino contract workers (often called ‘talents’), provides them with pre-departure lessons on singing and dancing (but not the language), and places them to bars (or night-clubs) in various parts of Japan<sup>6</sup>. Once a deal is made between the agent and the ‘entertainer,’ the agent advances the air ticket and one month salary with which she buys personal necessities and clothes to be worn at work. Usually the rest of the salary (i. e., five month worth) is paid upon the expiration of the contract. The airfare and the cost of documentation (passport, visa, etc.) are usually deducted from the salary. Therefore, unlike most of the other OCW cases, the ‘entertainers’ usually do not have to generate any cash prior to their application to the job<sup>7</sup>.

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the Philippines than in Japan). The historical background, dating back to the notorious Japanese “sex tours” in the 1970s, is discussed in de Dios, “*Japayuki-san: Filipinas at Risk*,” in Palma-Beltran and de Dios (1992: 42-43), and also in Matsui (1989). They also touch upon some characteristics of Japanese society, such as the overworked “salary men” (corporate warriors), that are behind the demand for the ‘entertainers.’

<sup>5</sup>According to Osteria (1994: p. 35), 28% of the surveyed ‘entertainers’ entered Japan as tourists and thus worked illegally.

<sup>6</sup>The details of the steps in this process are described in Osteria (1994: 32).

<sup>7</sup>Again this only applies to the majority of the cases (seven out of nine) found in Sisya. This may not apply for other cases of ‘entertainers.’

Since the salary is paid at the end of the contract period, a small amount of living expenses while in Japan is provided. The ‘entertainers’ are provided with an apartment room which they share with several (could be as many as a dozen) other ‘entertainers.’ They are also given daily allowances for food other than rice (which is provided) and other daily necessities which may be around Yen 3500 to Yen 5000 (US\$35 to US\$50, roughly) per week. Often they save such allowances for remittances back home.

The ‘entertainers’ are placed at local bars scattered around the country where they perform a combination of functions as hostesses, singers, dancers, waitresses, and other miscellaneous tasks such as washing dishes and cleaning after hour. The main part of their job is, however, customer service; serving drinks, talking to them (thus, while they have no pre-departure language training they appear to pick up the Japanese language very quickly by necessity), and singing with them along *karaoke*. Their typical work hour starts at 6 or 7 PM and ends at 1 or 2 AM. They usually have 2 to 4 days off per month. On these off-duty days, they often simply take a rest in order to save both energy and money. Some ‘entertainers,’ however, visit various tourist spots and amusement parks (Tokyo Disneyland being by far the most popular) taken by their customers or among themselves<sup>8</sup>.

When a recruiting agency is involved, which applies to almost all of our cases, the level of the salary that they receive ranged between US\$250 per month and US\$1,000 per month among our interviewees. The level of the salary for a particular individual appears to

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<sup>8</sup> According to the Sisyano ‘entertainers,’ there is a general rule imposed upon ‘entertainers’ that a private deal between a bar customer and an ‘entertainer’ is strictly prohibited. When a customer wants to “take out” one of the ‘entertainers’ for a date on her off-day, he needs to first ask the bar manager for a permission, and, besides, she must be accompanied by another male bar employee during the date. When a private deal is found, the ‘entertainer’ could be charged a fine of Yen 50,000 (US\$500). While I do not know whether this is a standard practice in this industry, at least this rule was enforced on the Sisyano ‘entertainers’ who I interviewed.

depend mainly on her previous experiences (see below). In addition, the salary level could be significantly higher if an ‘entertainer’ could strike a direct deal with bar managers and thus bypass the agent’s commission. However, since they have to have a contract to go the Japan in the first place and it is usually done by agents, the case of direct dealing usually occurs among those ‘entertainers’ who decided to stay (illegally) after the initial contract expires. We find one such case where the ‘entertainer’ reported to her father receiving US\$2,000 per month.

In addition to the salary, ‘entertainers’ could often earn tips or so called ‘backs,’ 10% of food and drinks ordered by own customers going to the ‘entertainers;’ if lucky, these additional income could add up to Yen 1,000 to Yen 5,000 per day. Since their salary is withheld until the end of the contract, these incomes together with the daily cash allowances mentioned above are the source of remittances back home while they are working in Japan.

The age of the nine ‘entertainers’ from Sisy (found in 1994) ranged between 18 and 29, and the average was 24. One of them made her initial trip to Japan when she was 15 years old. Many of them say that after the well publicized tragedy of “Maricris Sioson case” in 1991<sup>9</sup>, the regulation became tightened for the ‘entertainer’ of age below 23 to go to Japan and average age had risen somewhat. Nevertheless, many of the ‘entertainers’ were still of age below the official lower limit of 23 with fabricated documents.

The contract and the visa to work in Japan lasts six months. Except for one, all Sisyano ‘entertainers’ returned home after their contract ended. Typically they spend another six months or so in the Philippines preparing for the visa and the contract for the next visit. Often they are provided with (and required to take) dancing and singing lessons

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<sup>9</sup>Palma-Beltran (1992) includes the report of the senate investigation on this highly publicized incident.

by their recruiting agencies for that purpose. During this period they do not work in the Philippines but tend to stay home in Sisya. Then as soon as their next visa and the contract are obtained, they go back to Japan. They typically repeat this cycle of six-months-in-Japan-and-six-months-in-the Philippines. Among our Sisya 'entertainers' one had completed her 9th such cycle by 1994. As their skills (especially the language proficiency) improve with the accumulation of experiences, 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 go back. At least among our sample, the difference in the salary level, which ranges between US\$250 and US\$1,000, is mainly explained by the number of previous trips to Japan they have made as 'entertainers.'

### **3. Profiles of 'Entertainers' from Sisya<sup>10</sup>**

I was able to identify nine individual cases of 'entertainers' working in Japan from Sisya during a four month fieldwork in 1994. During my 1994 field work, house-to-house census was also conducted, which gathered information on household demographics, household income, agricultural activities, households assets and migration. In addition our discussion that follows is supplemented with earlier village censuses conducted by Prof. James N. Anderson in 1962, 1966, 1971, 1976 and 1981. Four of our 'entertainer' cases are concentrated in one of the four sitios in the barrio and three of the four are related (first cousins). Two of the nine 'entertainers' were married before they first went to Japan and all the others were unmarried upon their first trip to Japan. Among the seven (originally) unmarried 'entertainers,' one married with a Japanese man whom she met in Japan, retired from the 'entertainer' career, and lives there. One had a baby with a Japanese man (a

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<sup>10</sup> Major characteristics of each 'entertainer' are summarized in Table 1.

former customer) and another had a baby with a Filipino man who she met in Japan; neither of them was married as of 1994 and the children were taken care of by the parents of ‘entertainers.’ One married in the Philippines after two trips to Japan and retired from the career. Here, we will review the individual circumstances of each ‘entertainer’ from Sisya.

*Maria B.*<sup>11</sup>

Maria B. was born in 1969 as the 6th (among 14) child (2nd daughter) of Carlos B., then a tricycle driver from Barangay San Manuel (Pangasinan). Her mother is a native of Sisya. By the time Maria was born the entire family had moved from San Manuel to Sisya after disposing of a half hectare of farm land that Carlos inherited from his father. After moving from San Manuel to Sisya, Carlos, a high school graduate, became a tricycle driver and later became a tenant farmer. His wife also earned supplemental income from vegetable trading and taking laundry from neighbors. Tricycle driving is one of the typical, irregular occupations among the landless households. One of Maria’s elementary school teachers recalled that the family had difficulties providing Maria with enough cash to buy snacks at school.

After her third year at high school in Sisya, Maria went to Manila and started working as a sales lady. There she learned about the opportunity of working as an ‘entertainer’ in Japan from one of her relatives (her cousin (Christine V.)’s aunt), an ‘entertainer’ herself. After working as a sales lady for about three months she applied for the same Manila based agency (in Baclaran) that recruited her cousin’s aunt. While she

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<sup>11</sup>Unless otherwise noted, the information contained in this section was obtained by personal interviews with the ‘entertainers’ themselves. All 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. Individual names mentioned in our discussion are pseudonym.



admits that she liked dancing since very young, her main motivation for application to the ‘entertainer’ job was economic. Perhaps she had some familiarity about what she was getting into from her relative who was an ‘entertainer.’ Also by migrating to Manila she had been exposed to an urban environment. While the parents were very worried about their daughter’s new adventure, they did not object at the end.

After waiting for roughly one year since application, she made her first trip to Japan in 1986 at age 17. Her monthly salary then was US\$350. Since then, Maria repeated the typical cycle of six month contract in Japan and another six months in the Philippines; as of 1994 she had gone to Japan nine times. During her third trip in 1988 , she met one of her customers<sup>12</sup>, reportedly a 32 year old (then) general manager of a car dealer in Western Japan, eventually had a child, whom she gave birth in the Philippines. According to Maria, the man had promised to marry her but the marriage had been delayed because the man kept telling her that there was still some “problems” to be cleared<sup>13</sup>. After the birth of the daughter, Sakura<sup>14</sup>, the man sent regular income support to the family, at least up until 1994.

At every new contract her salary was raised gradually as she accumulated experiences. She earned monthly salary of US\$1,150 during her contract in 1994. If we assume that the first month salary is spent for necessary expenses (such as clothes) and another for plane ticket, this amounted to a four month total of US\$4,600 (or P115,000,

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<sup>12</sup>According to Maria, the man liked her immediately when he first saw her as a customer, and he came to her workplace as a customer every day. In principle, as mentioned, a personal deal between a customer and an ‘entertainer’ is prohibited; however, she explains, this man and the bar manager were friends. Gradually she “fell in love with him.”

<sup>13</sup>In fact, according to a neighbor, they made a plan of wedding in Sisya in 1993 with dates set and wedding sponsors (*compadre*) chosen. Shortly before the scheduled wedding, however, the groom-to-be canceled his trip to the Philippines, supposedly, due to his “sudden business engagement.”

<sup>14</sup>‘Sakura’ means cherry (blossoms), the symbol of spring season, in Japanese.

@P25=US\$). On the other hand, Carlos's 50% share, as a tenant farmer, of the gross farm income (before deducting farm expenses<sup>15</sup>) from rice and corn on his one hectare plot was P15,200. Maria, with only a six month contract, earned more than seven times her father as a full-time farmer; assuming Carlos's farm expenses as roughly one third of gross income (which makes his net farm income about P10,000), Maria earned more than ten times her father's income. In addition, during the year of 1994 when Maria gave birth to her daughter Sakura, the baby's father sent remittances regularly for the purpose of child support; they amounted to at least US\$1,000 (P25,000) to US\$2,000 (P50,000). Therefore, during the year of 1994, their entire family income is estimated as somewhere around P145,000 and P200,000; at least 85% (taking Carlos's gross income; using the estimated net income, the share becomes 97%) of the family income came from Maria and her 'boyfriend.' At the annual income of P200,000 the family ranks 17th from the top among the 498 households in the village income distribution. With Carlos's income alone of P15,200 (gross) and without Maria's and her boyfriend's contribution, the family would have ranked 381st in the village income distribution<sup>16</sup>.

The next question is: where does all the money go? Their daily expenses include (with rough estimates by Maria of annual expenses in parentheses): food expenditure (P24,000) , Sakura's formula milk (P18,000), electricity (P6,000), one house maid (P6,000), and one baby-sitter (P6,000). (P60,000 total annually). They also perhaps spent a major (but unknown) portion of the income on Sakura's clothes. In addition, their family had 4 school age children: one in collage, two in high school and one in elementary school.

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<sup>15</sup>Unfortunately, the information on farm expenses is not available

<sup>16</sup>If Maria had not been an 'entertainer,' she would be still earning some income (though at a much lower level), and also her parents might be earning higher income than the actual with additional work. However, such considerations are ignored in the present discussion.

Prior to Maria's trip to Japan, the level of schooling among her siblings were generally low; among Maria's five elder siblings one had a vocational training but all the others were elementary school graduates, and Maria herself stopped schooling before graduating high school. Among her younger siblings, on the other hand, one completed high school and four others are still in school at various levels including college. Now, the family is at least financially capable of sending them to collage.

The most visible sign of Maria's earnings, however, is the house lot and the house bought in 1991. They purchased a residential lot of 1,000 square meters at P45,000 (US\$1,800 @US\$1=P25), and built a two story house with the size of roughly 20 by 20 meters with 5 rooms for the estimated total cost of P350,000 (US\$14,000). Inside their house are major furniture (such as a couch and a baby crib) and most of major household electric appliances (a TV set, a VCR, refrigerator, stereo components, and electric fans). Without Maria's earnings, such a level of material well being would have been unimaginable. In addition, the family also bought agricultural machinery such as a hand tractor and a water pump.

Overall, Carlos and his wife appear happy with Maria's decision of becoming an 'entertainer' in Japan. Initially they were worried but did not object. They are no longer worried when she goes back to Japan. Inside their living room are displayed three large, framed pictures of Maria in her work costumes of different variety. On her part, Maria appears (rightly) proud of her contribution to the household. Nevertheless, she says that she would rather not let her younger sisters follow her own path to become 'entertainers.'

*Christine V.*

Christine V., a (first degree) cousin of Maria<sup>17</sup>, was born in 1972 as the first (of five) child of Alberto V., a tenant farmer with a half hectare. Alberto is a native of Sisya and his wife is from the central Luzon province of Tarlac. Like Maria, Christine stopped schooling before graduating from high school. She left Sisya and went to Manila at age 14. She stayed in Manila and subsequently in Angeles City in Tarlac with her aunt (her mother's sister). Christine's aunt herself was an 'entertainer' in Japan. Christine also heard from friends there about this opportunity. What she was most impressed about this unknown opportunity at that time, she recalls, was the story of Tokyo Disneyland; "it sounded like a lot of fun to go to Japan!" She applied for the job through her aunt's recruiting agency, and made her first trip to Japan in 1987 at age 15. The parents were worried about their daughter's trip to an unknown country, but they did not object.

Christine's initial monthly salary was US\$350, the same as Maria's. As of 1994, Christine had repeated 6 times the typical cycle of 6 month in Japan plus 6 month in the Philippines, and her monthly salary during her 6th contract in 1993 was US\$950. Assuming two month salaries as necessary expenses (clothes and a plane ticket), she had an estimated disposable annual income of roughly US\$ 3,800 (P95,000). Alberto's annual income from his half hectare of upland cultivation (with mango and eggplant) was reported as P24,400. Unlike Carlos, Alberto is able to keep all the income from the land; although he does not have the ownership to the land, the land had been mortgaged to him by the owner in exchange for a cash loan of P6,000 (US\$240)<sup>18</sup>. Without the cash income of

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<sup>17</sup>Maria's mother is Christine's father.

<sup>18</sup>Therefore, the half share of the net profit that Alberto would have paid as land rent to the owner was kept as interest payment from the land owner to him.

Christine, it would have been inconceivable that a tenant farmer of a half hectare can loan cash to his land owner.

In Sisya, that Christine is an ‘entertainer’ in Japan is not as readily apparent as Maria’s case, however. The fact that Alberto could extend cash loan to the landowner is one such indication. Another is the electric household appliances found in his house such as a TV set, a VCR, and a *karaoke* machine. However, their house looks just like any other tenant farmer’s; the size of the house is 8 by 12 meters with one bedroom and one living room, and it is simply constructed with hollow blocks and plywood. Alberto does not own his house lot, typical among tenant farmers. So where did all the money go? According to the parents, Christine’s household income support was not very large compared to her total earnings; Christine’s contribution to household income in 1993 was perhaps roughly US\$500 (P12,500). Although the total salary she earns was about four times that of her father’s gross farm income, her actual household support was roughly a half of her father’s gross revenue. Thus the family income (net of Christine’s personal consumption) was estimated as about P36,900; it ranked 198th from the top in the village income distribution. Without Christine’s contribution, it would have been P24,400 (Alberto’s gross income alone) and the family income ranking would have dropped to 275th among the 498 families.

Where did the rest of Christine’s earnings go? There were a couple of dresses that Christine purchased in Japan with each costing roughly US\$300 in her small closet in the house. Other than that, it appears that most of Christine’s earnings goes to her consumption expenditure such as her clothes and also ‘party’ expenses with her relatives when she comes back home.

For Christine, the main reason for her continued trips to Japan as an ‘entertainer’ is the lack of economic opportunity in the Philippines; “if I had a choice, I would rather not work as an ‘entertainer.’ But there is nothing else to do in the Philippines.” Unlike Maria,

Christine has never had a steady relationship with a Japanese man. She says that she is not interested in marrying a Japanese man but she would rather settle down in rural Philippines. However, she does not feel like getting along with female friends in the neighborhood; she feels that they tend to look down upon her because of her job. She was once engaged in a big fight with girls in the neighborhood, and since then she only invites her relatives in the barrio as well as in Tarlac for her “party” every time she returns from Japan.

*Erlinda V.*

Erlinda V., another cousin of Maria and Christine’s, was born in 1967 as the 6th (of 13) child (2nd daughter) of Francisco V.<sup>19</sup>. Until he passed away in 1988 at age 55, Fransisco had been a tenant farmer during most of his life. He used to till a half hectare in the early 1960s, nearly 3 hectares in the early 1970s, and one hectare in the mid 1970s. Other than farming, he had once worked at a mine located north of the village near Baguio. After graduating from high school in Sisya, Erlinda went to Manila and worked at her aunt’s bakery. After about two years at the bakery, she applied for the ‘entertainer’ position through the same agency as Maria’s and Christine’s.

The main reason for Erlinda’s decision to become an ‘entertainer’ was to repay the family debt. About a year before Erlinda’s first trip to Japan, Fransisco had fallen ill (asthma) and was hospitalized, which incurred the family a debt of P8,000 from a bank<sup>20</sup>. In addition, the family had also been indebted to Alberto’s brother for P10,000; the family borrowed the amount in order for their son to apply for a job in the Middle East and the recruiting agent (for whom the family paid the P10,000 as the processing fee) turned out to

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<sup>19</sup>Information on Erlinda V. was obtained from her mother.

<sup>20</sup>A bank loan is relatively rare in rural areas. The family owned a residential lot near the main highway that cut across the village and perhaps it served as a collateral.

be a fake agent<sup>21</sup>. Alberto, however, objected to Erlinda's decision; despite his illness and the family debt, Alberto did not allow Erlinda to go.

After all, despite her father's objection, Erlinda made her first trip to Japan anyway in December 1987 at age 20. Her initial monthly salary was around US\$350. According to the mother's memory (as of 1994), during her first trip to Japan, Erlinda contributed at least P30,000 (US\$1,200) to her family, with which the family was able to repay the debt. Unfortunately, Alberto died from asthma in April 1988 before Erlinda's first contract as an 'entertainer' in Japan expired in May. His funeral cost the family additional P5,000 (US\$200). In 1989 Erlinda went to Japan for the second time with a higher monthly salary of US\$450. According to her mother's memory, she contributed about P6,000 monthly while she was in Japan. During her second trip, Erlinda met a young Japanese architect of her same age and decided to marry. After her second contract expired, the wedding was held both in Sisyano and in Japan<sup>22</sup>. Erlinda lives in Japan and does not work as an 'entertainer' anymore. As of 1994, however, Erlinda still kept sending about P6,000 (US\$240) to P8,000 (US\$320) every other month, thus roughly P42,000 (US\$1,680) annually. In addition to Erlinda's remittances, a 25 year son also tilled a share cropped land of 0.6 hectare with annual gross income of P8,500. Therefore, 83% of family income

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<sup>21</sup>The family paid P6,000 as document expense (including passport) plus P4,000 commission to the agent in advance. The son received two weeks of training in Manila. After the training he came back home to wait for a telegram that was to come when the documents were processed and thus he was ready to depart. The telegram never came, and the agent was nowhere to be found by then. The 'fake recruiting agent' like this was a very common phenomenon in the Philippines during the 1980s. (See Tan) There were numerous victims of them in Sisyano alone during that period.

<sup>22</sup>Erlinda's mother attended the both wedding ceremonies, and she is possibly the only Sisyano who has been to Japan as a pure visitor. Of course, this is totally unthinkable for a wife of a share cropping tenant farmer (or almost anyone in the village for that matter), were it not for Erlinda's (unexpected) marriage.

support came from Erlinda's family in Japan. With the total household income of P50,500 (P42,000 from Erlinda plus P8,500 farm income) the family ranked 127th in the village income distribution (total 498 households). Without Erlinda's remittances and with the farm income alone the income ranking would have dropped to 461th.

Erlinda's migration to Japan not only led to the steady remittance income for her family. It also provided a stepping stone for possible chain migration for her male siblings. In April 1994, with the initial payment of P20,000 (for obtaining a plane ticket and all the other travel documents), one of Erlinda's younger brothers went to Japan as a tourist at age 21, and subsequently found a job (illegally) as a construction laborer with Erlinda's assistance.

#### *Elizabeth S.*

Elizabeth S. was born in 1970 as the first (of 6) child of Ferdinando S., a small owner-tenant farmer. After graduating from high school, Elizabeth attended a collage, but before graduation she decided to apply for the 'entertainer' job in Japan through the same agent as Maria's<sup>23</sup>. She made her first trip to Japan in February 1989 at age 19. According to Ferdinando, her monthly salary was US\$450, and she brought into the family P17,000 (US\$680) when she returned.

She went back to Japan for the second time in 1990. This time, after the six month contract expired she did not return but remained there illegally as a so called 'TNT'<sup>24</sup>. She found a job with direct contract (i. e., without an intermediary agent), which increased her income. She reported to her father that her monthly salary was nearly US\$2,000. During

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<sup>23</sup>The information on Elizabeth was mostly obtained from her father, Ferdinando.

<sup>24</sup> Those who overstay beyond their initial contract (and thus the valid visa) has expired are called TNT (*tago ng tago*: "hide and hide" or "always in hiding" in Filipino).



this second trip to Japan, Elizabeth met a young Filipino boyfriend, who reportedly came to Japan as a student initially and was working in the construction sector (presumably illegally). It appears likely that this newly met boyfriend was a main factor for her decision to remain in Japan illegally. She subsequently became pregnant, however, and nearing the delivery date, Elizabeth finally surrendered herself and returned to the Philippines to deliver a baby boy at home in August 1991. While she was working illegally she remitted about P38,000 (US\$1,500) three times and upon return she brought back P60,000 (US\$ 2,400). During the 1994 season, Ferdinando's gross farm income from his own 0.3 hectare plus tenanted 0.5 hectare totaled roughly P15,000. Therefore, when Elizabeth was working in Japan, she earned at least more than 6 times her father's income. However, since she stayed in Japan illegally during her last visit in 1990-91, she had not been able to obtain another contract (presumably with different name) as of 1994. The son she gave birth to was already three years old. If Elizabeth had been working in Japan and had contributed the same amount as she did in 1991 (i. e., P174,000), then the family income would have been P211,000 and the family's income ranking in the village would have been 14th from the top (while the actual income their ranking in 1994 was 194th).

Ferdinando initiated construction of a new house, of size 20 by 15 meters, on his own residential lot in 1992. The large two story house was unfinished as of 1994; it had external walls made of hollow blocks and the roof, but the inside was almost empty. Ferdinando said that in order to complete their house he needed Elizabeth to go back to Japan.

*Julita and Virginia M.*

Julita and Virginia M. were born in 1967 as 2nd child (2nd daughter ) and in 1971 as 5th child (3rd daughter), respectively<sup>25</sup>. They have seven brothers and sisters all together. Their father Jaime was a taxi driver in Manila when Julita was born. He later became a family driver in Manila, and by the time Virginia was born the family had moved to Sisyá from where Jaime commuted to Manila for his work. Household census data taken by James Anderson in the mid 1970s indicate that the family was relatively well off by the village standard. For example, the family apparently had enough cash income to loan; they held (in exchange for a cash loan) a mortgaged land of 1.5 hectare. Since Jaime had his full time job and all his children were still small, the land was cultivated by a tenant with a share cropping arrangement. In addition, the eldest daughter was enrolled in a private high school in *Poblacion* (the town proper). According to a local school teacher who is a parent of Virginia's elementary school classmate and who herself is among the better off in the village recalls that Virginia's family was "just like us."

The family's life took an unexpected turn, however, when Jaime passed away due to a sudden heart attack at age 42 in 1981, when Julita and Virginia were 14 and 10 years old, respectively. Although Jaime had inherited a half hectare of rain-fed land from his mother<sup>26</sup>, the family decided to sell the land after Jaime's death in order to cover the schooling expenses of the children<sup>27</sup>.

About two years after her father's death and after graduating from high school, Julita became an 'entertainer.' She worked as an 'entertainer' during the period between

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<sup>25</sup>The information on them is based on the conversations with Virginia and her mother.

<sup>26</sup>It is not clear when this inheritance took place, however.

<sup>27</sup>The half hectare rain-fed land (bancag) was sold for P20,000 to a Sisyá resident (a former OCW in Saudi Arabia and a rice mill owner) in 1982.

her 16 and 22 years of age (between 1983 and 1989). According to her mother, during this period Julita did not remit nor bring back much money to support the family. At one point, Julita was proposed a marriage by a Japanese man while she was working there, and he promised to come to the Philippines for wedding. However, after Julita returned home after her contract in 1989, the man never came. According to Virginia, the unfaithful and irresponsible behavior of this particular individual caused her a great disillusionment toward working in Japan and her view of Japan in general. Shortly after this event, she retired from this career, got married (with a Filipino man) and settled down as a housewife<sup>28</sup>.

Virginia went to Manila after graduating from high school in Sisyua to live with Julita who were already in Manila, and enrolled in a collage. After one year at collage, however, Virginia stopped schooling at age 17, due to lack of money according to her, and stayed in Manila without any significant work. She recalls that Julita and Virginia, though living together, did not get along very well. During this time, her ‘entertainer’ friends “convinced her” to apply for the job; they would say to her that it was a lot of fun to go to Japan. “Realizing that there was no job opportunity in the Philippines,” Virginia made her 1st trip to Japan in December 1989 at age 18. Her initial monthly salary was US\$350, the same level as most of the others from Sisyua, and her contract was arranged by the same recruiting agent as Maria’s. The bar that Virginia was assigned to in Toyama prefecture in Japan happened to have many customers among *yakuza* gangsters. According to her, while she never fell a direct victim of them there were lots of physical fighting in the bar among different *yakuza* factions while she was on duty. As a consequence, her and her colleagues’

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<sup>28</sup>Unfortunately, I was not able to meet Julita. In addition, Julita did not tell much about her work to Virginia and, according to Virginia, she and Julita did not get along very well. Therefore we do not have Lisa’s own side of the story regarding her family support (or the lack of it), nor her experiences in Japan and her marriage.

contract with the bar was terminated one month earlier than the original contract due to the chaotic situation caused by frequent infighting among them, and she had to return home. Understandably, this experience did not leave Virginia a positive impression of Japan and she did not seek another contract as an ‘entertainer;’ instead she went back to schooling and pursued vocational training in computer.

Within a year after her trip to Japan, however, her friends “again convinced her” to get back to her ‘entertainer’ career. She went back for the second time in January 1991 with monthly salary of US\$700. Subsequently, she followed the typical six month cycle and had gone back to Japan twice as of 1994. Her monthly salary at her third contract was US\$850 and at her fourth contract was US\$1,000. During her second to fourth trips she went back to the same bar and she could obtain her contract directly (i. e., without having a recruiting agency in between) which increased her salary. Unlike her elder sister, Virginia saved her supplementary income such as tips and food allowances and sent monthly remittances of between US\$200 (P5,000) and US\$400 (P10,000) to her mother while she worked in Japan.

As of 1994, there were six members in the household; Jaime’s wife and five children. The first child (daughter) and Julita were married and had their own households (the first child was in Taiwan working as a domestic helper but she was not sending any money to her mother). The 26 year old eldest son worked as a tricycle owner-driver with estimated annual income of P25,000. Virginia, age 22, earned estimated gross income of US\$ 7,800 (P195,000) and the second son, age 23, was working in Saudi Arabia as a waiter with estimated annual gross income of US\$4,800 (P120,000). With Virginia’s remittances the total family income was P81,800, of which roughly 57% came from Virginia, and it was 69th from the top in the village income distribution. Without Virginia’s contribution, the

household income would have been P35,000 and the income ranking would have dropped to 207th among the 498 village households.

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 inherited land, the family expanded their residential lot by purchasing an adjacent lot to their original house lot<sup>29</sup>. In addition, they renovated and enlarged their house; the estimated value of their house in 1994 was roughly P150,000. They have most of the household electric appliances such as a refrigerator, stereo components, two TV sets and a VCR. Her house is also filled with the gift items she received from her customers including two stereo radio cassette recorders and numerous (20 or 30) stuffed animals. After Virginia's third trip in 1993, they purchased a motorcycle with a side car ("tricycle") for P75,000 (US\$3,000) which the first son now drives for commercial operation. In addition, the family has two school age children whose education Virginia's earnings have been paying for: one at collage (age 20) and the other at high school (age 13).

Virginia's mother is quite proud of her daughter. She does not appear to be ashamed of her occupation at all. Virginia realizes that many other villagers are curious about her job. She tends to ignore the attention she often draws from other people and she does not seem to care about the others' perceptions of her. She suspects that "maybe they are envious." Virginia well recognizes the potential dangers involved in staying in this business; she had witnessed tragic cases of forced prostitution, 'entertainers' who committed suicide, and the nature of *yakuza* gang<sup>30</sup>. Despite all the potential danger and temptations of various sorts, however, she feels that she is in control of herself. She could

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<sup>29</sup>They purchased 3,000 square meters of land for P10,000 in 1991.

<sup>30</sup>Her comment on *yakuza*: "Not every *yakuza* is a bad person; some are nice some are not. Some of them are quite dangerous indeed."

never understand those fellow Filipino ‘entertainers’ breaking up with their former boyfriends or even husbands in the Philippines to marry Japanese men. She is not interested (nor particularly averse to) marrying a Japanese eventually. In fact, after her second trip a young Japanese man followed her to Sisy in order to propose a marriage. She did not feel ready for marriage and thus she decline the offer. In her view, the ‘entertainer’ is the best economic opportunity available to her; she prefers being an ‘entertainer’ to a domestic helper (DH) in Hong Kong or in Singapore because (1) the salary is higher, (2) the DH contract typically lasts for 2 years whereas the ‘entertainer’ contract lasts only for 6 months, and (3) usually there is no initial cash required for placement.

*Margarita and Myra D.*

Myra D. was born as 3rd (of 8) child (2nd daughter) in 1969 and Margarita as 5th child (and 3rd daughter) in 1975, respectively. Their father, Jose D., had been a tenant farmer as well as a part-time contract welder during most of his adult life until the family started a small “sari-sari store” in the village in 1993. Jose also worked in Manila for about two years as helper mechanic in his early 20s. His farm size as a tenant farmer was one hectare in the mid 1960s and was a half hectare in the early 1970s.

By the early 1980s Jose concentrated on his contract welding and apparently stopped farming. At the time of the 1981 census collection, the enumerator’s comment says that “Jose earns quite high with his welding contracts but he spends much of his income for *barkada*” ( such as drinking with his friends). His wife, however, “is very thrifty and she does not complain and tries to make both ends meet.” Sometimes Jose’s wife also was engaged in “sideline” businesses of various sorts, such as native cake making and handicraft weaving, in order to earn supplementary income. She had also worked at a candy factory in Manila before she married for about five years.

Against such a background, Jose's wife (Margarita's mother) learned about the business of 'entertainers' from one of her distant relatives and decided to take Margarita to a recruiting agency in a nearby town of San Juacinto in 1992<sup>31</sup>. Margarita was then 16 years old; she had stopped her schooling at her 2nd year high school and then had worked in Baguio and in Manila. Unlike the Manila based agency that all the previously introduced girls used initially, the family had to make initial payment in order to apply for their daughter's placement. They sold eleven pigs that they used to raise in order to generate the cash. Margarita made her first trip to Japan in 1992. Upon Margarita's return in 1993, with her earnings her parents started a "sari-sari store" business right by the highway that cut through the village.

Margarita then made her 2nd trip back to Japan in early 1994 at age 18. Her monthly salary was US\$600. While she was working in Japan she sent US\$100 (P2,500) back to the family. In addition, on the day after she came home in July 1994, the family purchased a brand new motor cycle for P55,000 (US\$2,200) from her salary. Their plan was to start a "tricycle" operation driven by their 16 year old son. Assuming Margarita's household income contribution as the total of remittances plus US\$2,500 salary upon return, their estimated total household income in 1994 was P101,100 and the family ranked 47th from the top of the village income distribution. Without her contribution, the household income would have been P36,000 and the family would have ranked 198th in terms of income among the 498 households.

Margarita's elder sister Myra entered this business much later and in a very different context<sup>32</sup>. She was married and had one child. Her husband used to work for a hotel in

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<sup>31</sup>The information on Margarita was obtained mostly from Jose's brother who lives next to them and her parents. I was able to meet Margarita only very briefly on the day she returned from Japan which was the day before I was to leave the village.

<sup>32</sup>She was still in Japan while I was in Sisya. Her information was obtained from her

Baguio. However he lost his job after the 1991 earthquake and had not found any stable job since then. Nevertheless he is fond of drinking with his *barkadas* (friends) and he kept this habit even after he lost his job. She therefore decided to follow her younger sister's path, and she went to Japan in January 1994 when she was 24 years old. Her monthly salary, according to her parent, was US\$450. She had not sent any of her income back to her parents' home since she had her own family to support.

The major portion of the income earned by Margarita was spent on investment in small businesses. They used a portion of her earnings from her 1st trip on the start-up capital of "sari-sari" store business. Her earnings from the second trip was used to start a tricycle operation. On the other hand, maybe partly due to the fact that their daughter had gone to Japan only twice as of 1994 (as compared to, for example, Maria's nine times), their house and the household appliances were (still) relatively modest.

#### *Francisca C.*

The case of Francisca C. is somewhat similar to that of Myra D.<sup>33</sup> She was born in 1965 as the 3rd child (2nd daughter) of Ricardo C.. Ricardo was a tailor when he was young but later became a small owner-tenant farmer in Sisy. During the 1960s and 1970s he used to farm 1 to 1.5 hectare of land, while he expanded his land holding through land purchase during the 1980s.

Francisca had vocational training in medical secretary, and was married when she applied for the 'entertainer' job in Manila in 1993. Her husband had gone to Australia with

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parents and from one of Jose's brothers who lived right next to them.

<sup>33</sup>The information on Francisca C. is most scanty among the 'entertainers' from Sisy. She lived in the province of Bulacan with her in-laws and the story that follows is obtained from her father, and from her cousin in Sisy.



the assistance of Ricardo's sister who had migrated to Australia; presumably he had intended to work in Australia in order to support Francisca and their son. Instead he borrowed some money from Ricardo's sister without repayment, fell in love with a Filipino Australian woman and proposed to Francisca that they separate. Relatives from both sides of the marriage, with a help of a priest from the 'Born Again' Christian church which the family belonged to, dissuaded him and his new girlfriend from this plot. Francisca's husband returned to the Philippines but soon after he left for Singapore. Francisca was working as a sales lady at a major department store in Manila. Facing the necessity to support herself and her son, however, Francisca apparently opted for a higher income opportunity. She decided to become an 'entertainer' in Japan, to which Ricardo objected. Despite her father's objection, she left for Japan in January 1994 and came back after her 6 month contract ended in July. As of 1994, she lived with her husband's parents in the central Luzon province of Bulacan. While working in Japan Francisca did not send any remittance to Ricardo but all her earnings presumably went to her own family and in-laws in Bulacan. According to what Francisca told Ricardo, her Japanese employer was generally good to her and she intended to go back to Japan when she could obtain another contract. In the meantime, she had no intention of separating from her husband "for the sake of the child."

#### **4. Implications of Our 'Entertainers'**

Our sample size is quite small and thus we need to be cautious in attempting any generalization from such a small number of cases. However, there are some notable similarities among these cases, and, perhaps more importantly, there are some important differences among even such a small number of cases. In this section, we will discuss such similarities and differences among the 'entertainers' from Sisy.

First of all, we should note that these ‘entertainers’ from Sisy are quite lucky in terms of their experiences in Japan. They are among the more “successful” of the foreign workers coming to Japan. Most notably, unlike some of the more tragic examples reported by popular media, none of the ‘entertainers’ was engaged in prostitution or any other sort of sex businesses (which is indeed numerous) in Japan. None of them appeared to be a victim of extreme exploitation or violence. All of them entered Japan with valid contract and visa. Most of them kept returning to Japan with increasing salaries. All of them earned enormously large incomes, by the village standard, which would have been unimaginable anywhere in the Philippines.

Beyond that, we will now discuss some of more subtle similarities and differences below.

*Preconditions before migration 1: socio-economic family background*

Most of our ‘entertainers’ share similar socio-economic family background; they tend to come from relatively less wealthy households. Except for one case (Jaime M.) the household heads were (at one point or another) either tenant or owner-tenant farmers with very small operating holdings. At the time of their daughter’s migration, none of them was a well-off farmer or had regular non-agricultural income (e. g., small business operator, private or public sector employee such as school teachers). In terms of the educational attainment, all of the fathers of the ‘entertainers’ had graduated from elementary school and some of them had high school education, but none of them had college education. Almost all of the mothers (except for Julita and Virginia’s) only had elementary school education. Thus, it may be the mother’s education that matters more than father’s.

On the other hand, however, we should note that none of the ‘entertainer’ families are from the poorest segment of the village hierarchy. Those economically most insecure

households are landless laborers engaged in seasonal agricultural labor (such as planting, harvesting and weeding) and other casual jobs (e. g., occasional carpentry, handicraft, market porter, umbrella repairing, etc.). None of the family belongs to this group. Tenant farmers or owner tricycle drivers (Carlos B.) have certain degrees of security due to their regular access to (though modest) means of production.

*Preconditions before migration 2: 'entertainers' own background*

Again there appear to be a few similarities among the 'entertainers' from Sisya in terms of their own pre-migration background: relatively modest education, urban experiences including unemployment, low birth order, access to the "migration network" of some sort, and perhaps certain features in the physical appearances. Their educational attainment varies but none of our sample appears to have had a potential for highly educated professional careers prior to going to Japan. While there are quite a few collage graduates from the village these days, none of the 'entertainers' was a collage graduate. Three (Elizabeth, Virginia, Julita) started collage but never graduated. Two had some vocational training (Virginia, Francisca) and one (Erlinda) is a high school graduate. The rest, nearly half of the total sample, (Maria, Christine, Margarita, Myra) never finished high school and one is an elementary school graduate. Therefore, our sample of 'entertainers' slightly differs from their often depicted general picture as well-educated, which often emerges from the literature (for example, Osteria (1994: 23) found that 46% of her respondents had college education).

Secondly, all of them had some exposure to urban life styles in Manila or in other large cities (such as Angeles City and Baguio) before applying for the 'entertainer's job. Most of them had worked for a commercial sector in the city, most commonly as a sales lady. At the same time, their general economic prospects in such an environment appeared

to them to be rather slim<sup>34</sup>. However, none of them had worked as hostesses or other types of ‘entertainers’ in the Philippines before going to Japan.

Thirdly, most of them learned about this job opportunity from their friends they met in such environments: in many cases those experienced ‘entertainers’ provided them with the general information on the work conditions, “convinced them that it was fun to go to Japan,” and introduced to them a reliable recruiting agency. This is reflected by the fact that six of the nine ‘entertainers’ (Maria, Christine, Erlinda, Elizabeth, Julita and Virginia) at least initially went through the same recruiting agency and three of them are in fact cousins. In addition, except for the case of Margarita they were away from their parents’ care when they decided to apply for the job.

Another notable feature appears to be the relatively low birth order of the ‘entertainers’ and relatively large number of siblings in the family<sup>35</sup>. Two of them (Elizabeth, Christine) are the first child in the family. Another four of them (Maria, Erlinda, Julita, Myra, Francisca) are second daughters and two (Virginia, Margarita) are third daughters. The total number of siblings varies between five and thirteen and the average is 7.8. Excluding Myra and Francisca who are married and thus had own families to support, all the others had between three to seven (average 4.4) younger siblings. Apparently, their socially expected role of supporting the schooling of their younger siblings, typically regarded as a responsibility of older siblings in the Philippines, was a strong incentive for them to apply for the job.

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<sup>34</sup>Osteria (1994: 33) also finds that about two thirds of her respondents being unemployed prior to becoming ‘entertainers’ and, among those who were employed, the majority were clerical and sales workers.

<sup>35</sup>Osteria (1994: 25) similarly finds that 65% of her respondents were 1st or 2nd child.

In the case of international migration in general, access to migrant networks (i. e., “sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants, and nonmigrants in origin and destination areas through ties of kinship, friendship and shared community origin”) is one of the crucial elements for (successful) migration,<sup>36</sup> and the case of ‘entertainers’ in Japan appears no exception. Almost all of the ‘entertainers’ from Sisya appear to have had relatively easy access to information, through friends and relatives (“migration network”), about the nature of the employment and about a reliable recruiting agency. Osteria (1994: 31) also found that almost all of her respondents had access to information through friends or relatives.

Finally, a more subtle feature that appears to be shared among our sample is the (physical) appearance. Perhaps, they all have certain features that fit the market demand in Japan. At least all of them I met have relatively light rather than dark complexion. Their overall size is medium, not too tall. In short, they are relatively “good looking,” perhaps from the Japanese male customers’ point of view.

#### *What triggered migration?*

Why did they decide to become ‘entertainers’ in Japan? There appear to be three distinct patterns among our sample: an immediate family crisis (Erlinda, Julita, Francisca, Myra), the encouragement of “friends,” without any dramatic trigger event (Maria, Christine, Elizabeth, Virginia) , and the parents’ encouragement (Margarita). Four of our nine cases represent a “family crisis pattern” where major crisis occurred in the family which triggered the decision to work as an ‘entertainer’ in Japan. The death of the household head was the major family crisis in the family of Julita and Virginia M.. It is

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<sup>36</sup>Massey, et al. (1994: 728).

possible that neither Julita nor Virginia decided to become ‘entertainers’ had their father not died. Similarly in Erlinda’s case it was the accumulation of family debt due to her father’s illness (and his subsequent death) as well as the fake recruiter. For both Francisca C. and Myra D. who were married with children of their own, it was the loss of income support from their respective husbands that induced their migration; Francisca’s husband had gone abroad without supporting the family back home, and Myra’s husband lost his job due to the Baguio earthquake.

In the second pattern, on the other hand, there does not seem to exist any particular crisis event that induced their decision to become ‘entertainers.’ True, their families were not well off and they had many younger siblings for whom they were supposed to be financially responsible at least partially. However, both of their parents were working and by no means belonged to the poorest segment of the village community. Rather, in these cases (Maria, Christine, Elizabeth, Virginia) their decision to migrate appears to have been induced mainly by their peer in Manila or Angeles City where they resided at the time of migration. In these places they met new friends who had experiences as ‘entertainers’ and who convinced them that going to Japan would give them fun experiences as well as money.

Finally, Margarita’s case is quite different. While Margarita had similar urban exposures as the others, it was her mother who took the initiative and actually took to a recruiting agency. The household head was apparently spending major portions of income on alcohol consumption but they did not seem to be facing a more dramatic family crisis event. However, the wife was the one responsible for the family finance, and her economic strategy was to let her daughter utilize the opportunity to work as an ‘entertainer.’

### *Parents' attitudes toward migration*

All of the 'entertainers' in our sample were the first overseas contract workers (OCWs) from the respective families. Therefore, given the unknown job in the unknown country<sup>37</sup>, most of the parents were very worried about sending their young (mostly teenage) daughters to Japan as 'entertainers.' However, the initial reaction of the parents toward their daughter's decision to become 'entertainers' in Japan varies widely. Two (Erlinda's, Francisca's) of the six pairs of parents, especially fathers, strongly objected the idea of working in Japan. Three others were worried but did not object. As mentioned above, in all of these cases their daughters were not living with their parents at the time of their application to the job. Therefore, even in the cases where the parents objected, they did not have direct control over their daughters' action after all. Despite their parents' objection they became 'entertainers.'

In contrast, the case of Margarita differs from the other cases. It was the parents (especially mother) who encouraged the daughter to apply for the job. She took her to the recruiting agency and they provided the initial capital for the application by selling pigs that had been kept in the family.

### *How much to remit?*

Among our sample there is very little variation in the initial monthly salary level at around US\$350 among individual 'entertainers.' In all the cases their salary level went up significantly at every new contract as the number of previous trips (thus presumably their language and other customer service skills) increased, reaching a US\$1,000 level. Average annual household contributions among our observations is roughly P73,400 (US\$2,900),

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<sup>37</sup>Except for Margarita, Myra and Francisca, their initial trip to Japan was long before the highly publicized case of 'Maricris Sioson' incident in 1991.

while Osteria (1994:43) found that the average remittance among her respondents was Yen 45,000 (US\$450).

However, the degree of economic support that they provided toward their household seems to differ significantly among individuals<sup>38</sup>. First of all, the two married women who became ‘entertainers’ due to their family crises (Francisca and Myra) did not contribute income support toward their households of origin (i. e., their parent’s households). Most of their earning is likely to have gone to their own family, especially to their children.

There are still large differences among the unmarried cases regarding the degree of household support that they gave to their parents’ households. On the one hand, the majority of those (Maria, Elizabeth, Erlinda, Margarita and Virginia) appear to have contributed significant portion (between 24% to 72%) of their earnings to the households. It is apparent from their noticeably improved house, debt repayment and productive investments (agricultural machinery, tricycle). On the other hand, the relative contribution by two of our sample (Christine and Julita) appears to be much more modest (9%). Although Christine had been to Japan six times by 1994 their house was no different than a typical house of a small tenant farmer in the neighborhood. Instead, Christine herself admits that most of her earnings were spent either on her own consumption (especially clothes) or on the social occasions shared among her relatives. Lisa’s mother complained (and contrasted with Virginia) that she never contributed much to the family income support although the information is not available as to how Julita spent most of her earnings.

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<sup>38</sup>Osteria (1994: 47) conducted a regression analysis on her survey data and found that the remittance as the percentage of the ‘entertainers’ income was positively related to the birth order and negatively related to the number of siblings, family size and the income level.



*What is the remittance spent on?*

Except for the two married cases (Myra and Francisca) the majority of the ‘entertainers’ remitted and brought back significant portions of their earnings to their parents’ households. How was the money spent? The most common expenditures among the households not only with the ‘entertainers’ but with OCWs in general are, first, household electronics (such as stereo radio cassette recorders, TV sets, VCRs, refrigerators, electric fans, etc.), and, second, house improvements. The Maria family’s house lot and the very large house on it were purchased with Maria’s earnings. The additional house lot was purchased and major renovation and expansion of the house was made possible by Virginia’s earnings. The Elizabeth’s father started the construction of a large two story house with Elizabeth’s earnings and they badly needs her additional earnings to complete the house.

Following the household electronics and house improvements, another common use of the earnings from OCWs including ‘entertainers’ is education. While none of our ‘entertainers’ is a collage graduate, the younger siblings are attending college in Maria’s and Virginias’ families, and generally the earnings of the ‘entertainers’ is likely to have contributed significantly to the educational expenses of their younger siblings at below college levels as well. In addition, some households spent significant portions of their earnings in productive investment. Maria’s father purchased agricultural machinery such as a hand tractor and a water pump. Virginia’s and Margarita’s families both purchased tricycles to start local transportation operations. Margarita’s family also set up a ‘sari-sari’ store business with the earnings of Margarita.

The salary levels of ‘entertainers’ are extremely high by the local standard. Therefore even with a modest percentage of that income they become the breadwinner of their households. In our 1994 survey, the ‘entertainers’ contributed between 34%

(Christine) to 91% (Maria and her boyfriend's contribution) of household income support. With their earnings the household income of these households ranked between 17th and 198th from the top in the village income distribution<sup>39</sup>. Without the earnings from their daughters, their income ranking would have fallen to between 198th and 461st in the income distribution.

### *Return Migration*

Except for the first timers as of 1994, all of the 'entertainers' from Sisyva went to Japan more than once. Except for those who quit this career due to marriage (Erlinda and Julita), most of them appear to be trying to repeat the cycle as long as possible. Among our sample the largest number of return trips to Japan as of 1994 was (Maria's) nine times, and, being an unmarried mother, she had no intention of quitting. Every time they obtained a new contract their salary went up. In one case, the household head (Ferdinando) had started a very large house renovation relying on his daughter's earnings. Despite the fact that she overstayed in her last trip and therefore it is now much more difficult to obtain another contract, her father desperately needs Elizabeth's income in Japan and was waiting for her to obtain another contract and visa (presumably, this time under a different name). Therefore most of them do repeat their trips, and their continuous household support through repeated migration no doubt contributed significantly to the family's wealth formation including the house lot and the house, human capital or agricultural investments.

In comparison, Osteria (1994: 35, 42) found that 17% of her respondents had worked in Japan more than once at the time of her survey and that 52% responded that they intended to come back to Japan again after the current contact.

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<sup>39</sup>The family of Ricardo, the father of Francisca, is not included here since she has her own family and therefore did not contribute any support to Ricardo's household.

### *Relationships*

Among our nine cases of ‘entertainers,’ two (Myra, Francisca) were married at the time when they applied for the job. Among the rest of seven, we can observe divergent patterns of developments in personal relationships and marriage. One (Erlinda) married a Japanese man she met during her second trip to Japan and settled down in Japan<sup>40</sup>. Another (Maria) had a relationship with a former customer, had a child with him (and gave birth in the Philippines), but she had not married (and perhaps was not likely to marry) him as of 1994. One (Elizabeth) had a relationship with a Filipino man who she met during her second trip to Japan, had a child, and had not married (and perhaps was not likely to marry) him. One (Julita) encountered an unfaithful Japanese man who proposed a marriage but never fulfilled his promise of following her to the Philippines, and married with a Filipino man and settled down. The rest (Christine and Virginia) did not seem to have had significant relationships during her career as an ‘entertainer,’ nor were they particularly interested in marrying a Japanese man. These cases defy easy generalizations regarding the ‘entertainers’ experiences in relationships while they work in Japan.

### *How do the other villagers see them?*

Generally many villagers seem to hold a rather ambivalent view toward those ‘entertainers.’ On the one hand, they seem to sympathize toward their “sacrifice” by becoming an ‘entertainer’ and fulfilling their responsibility toward her parents and her younger siblings. On the other hand, due to the media coverage, perhaps everyone knows the nature of their job and potential dangers. Since they are a small minority in Sisya, the

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<sup>40</sup>Osteria’s survey (1994: 29) found that among the single ‘entertainers’ 13% eventually married a Japanese.

occupation of ‘entertainer,’ commonly referred to as *Japayuki*<sup>41</sup>, perhaps is stigmatized to a large extent. Sometimes the encounter with the curiosity of other villagers are not comfortable (Virginia and Christine) and at least one of our ‘entertainers’ (Christine) was engaged in a major fight with her young peer in the village because of that. Especially more well educated women and those from relatively better off families than those families of ‘entertainers’ seem to regard this occupational option as rather “shameful.” According to a female school teacher who know them well, those ‘entertainers’ choose to go to Japan “looking for money, adventure and a future husband.” Therefore, such possible negative reactions among their neighbors and the peers which could lead to strained social relations appear to be a potential social cost for those who become ‘entertainers’ as well as their families.

*What are special about ‘entertainer’ cases?*

Another question that arises naturally is: why those women became entertainers in Japan and why *not* others in the same village? Given our sample size, we do not have systematic information to give a very good answer at the moment. Nevertheless, as a tentative and speculative answer to the question, it appears that certain combination of personality traits and circumstances (which are already discussed previously) appears to be the main factor. Apart from the extremely higher earnings, the major factor that differentiates ‘entertainer’ as an occupational choice from other types of female OCWs is a widely held negative image among villagers of this occupation, based perhaps on media coverage of a few high profile cases. Therefore, despite the obvious and enormously high financial gains, there is a quite strong psychological threshold to cross between, for

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<sup>41</sup>See footnote 3.

example, becoming a domestic helper in Middle East or Hong Kong and becoming an ‘entertainer.’ While those ‘entertainers’ typically tend to come from below-average classes or tend to face certain economic crises, none is from the very bottom of the village hierarchy. Thus, there are many other young women under similar socio economic conditions. Perhaps it would require a combination of personal traits, circumstances and chance events that gives a strong enough momentum to cross the threshold of becoming an ‘entertainer.’ For example, at least among the ‘entertainers’ from this village, they appear not so good performers at school (or some had dropped out); so their ‘reputation cost’ may have been relatively lower than other young women with better reputation. They tend to like, or at least do not dislike, singing and dancing. I do get an impression that they all have rather independent and strong mind.<sup>42</sup> And they tend to have certain physical appearances that are of value to many Japanese men. In terms of the circumstance, even though parents generally (except for one out of the nine cases) didn’t like the idea of their daughters becoming ‘entertainers,’ when those young women made their initial decision to become ‘entertainers’ parental supervision or influence was weak since many were away from home.

Access to migration network is often found to be a major determinant of migration (especially international migration) in literature, as we discussed above. That likely have been the case among common types of OCWs (construction workers, domestic helpers, etc.) in the Middle East and South East Asia, given the way such OCWs spread rapidly during the 1980s in Sisy as information became increasingly available. If access to network was the key constraint on becoming ‘entertainers’ in this village, we might have

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<sup>42</sup> It is not clear, however, to what extent they were born with such a trait and to what extent they became independently and strongly minded because of their experiences as ‘entertainers.’

expected the number to increase as access to it became increasingly available over time. However, the number of ‘entertainers’ in the village did not increase. Given the way this kind of information spread among villagers, necessary information would probably be readily available from those current or former ‘entertainers’ in order for prospective ‘entertainers’ to have access to such networks. Thus, it is possible that people generally choose not to become ‘entertainers’ even if access to such network was potentially available. On the other hand, however, it is true that unlike some other places in the Philippines, no story was found of recruiters coming down to the village to recruit potential ‘entertainers.’ Had there been such attempts by brokers, results might have been a bit different. Also it is true that in the majority of the (admittedly very small number of) cases that I know of, a main direct trigger event that induced these young women to make an initial trip to Japan was encounters, in Manila or in Angeles, with ‘friends’ or ‘relatives’ who had been ‘entertainers’ themselves. Thus access to network perhaps does play an important role. Nevertheless, it appears, it was not so much the access to network per se as the personal traits or circumstances that brought them to those urban locations in the first place where they meet such ‘friends,’ as well as those traits mentioned above, that are key.

## **5. Conclusions**

Perhaps the stories from Sisya do not necessarily constitute a representative sample of the Filipino ‘entertainers’ in Japan; there are many sources of sampling biases. Our ‘entertainers’ are from a single Northern Luzon village where such cases are a small minority, while these ‘entertainers’ generally are observed to come from urban areas<sup>43</sup>. The

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<sup>43</sup>For example, Osteria (1994:22) found that 77% of her respondent ‘entertainers’ were from Metro Manila and its adjoining provinces (i. e., Cavite, Batangas, Laguna, Bulacan and Rizal), and only 5% were from “Northern Luzon” (i. e., Ilocos, Pangasinan, La Union, Nueva Ecija, Pampanga).

number of our cases is extremely small. The majority of our cases (six out of nine) were recruited through a single agency. Overall, our ‘entertainers’ do not appear as well educated as the general population of ‘entertainers.’

Nevertheless, the small number of cases found in Sisya still illustrate the divergence of experiences among Filipino ‘entertainers’ in Japan. They defy easy stereotyping of this occupation. For example, de Dios (1992:50) once noted that “(t)here is a thin line that distinguishes “entertainment” that capitalizes on women’s sexuality and docility to men in hostessing from actual prostitution. This is fairly evident in the thousands of cases of forced or induced prostitution among Filipina *Japayuki-san*.” In none of our cases, however, did the ‘entertainer’ cross such “thin line.” In addition to the absence of engagement in prostitution, our samples were relatively successful also in that they earned a significant amount of income that their respective fathers could never dreamt of, that most of them were flexible enough to be able to adjust themselves to the new culture and new environments relatively quickly, and that almost all of them repeatedly went back to Japan with significant contributions (though with differing degree) to their household incomes<sup>44</sup>.

However, this is not to deny the potential dangers they face and necessary policy measures to protect them and eventually eliminate the factors that necessitate those rural households to depend on the commodification of their daughters’ sexuality. As identified by Osteria through her survey (1994: 41), many ‘entertainers’ face various problems while they work in Japan, including harsh working conditions, illnesses arising from fatigue, alcoholism and drug addiction, emotional involvement with the customers, feelings of isolation, jealousy among coworkers, communication gaps, as well as sexual abuse. In

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<sup>44</sup>Again, contrast this with De Dios (1992: 50); “Realistically, it is very difficult for the entertainers to be able to pay her debts or send money back home on the basis of her salary and her tips simply because she can only work legally for six months. It is this situation of economic need that predispose many to engage in prostitution.”

addition, the reliance on the ‘entertainers’ can only be a short-term household strategy, if it can be seen as such. Therefore the relative allocation of their income between productive investments (such as higher education, small businesses or agricultural investment) versus non-productive expenditure (such as house improvements, electronic appliances and other consumer goods) is crucial for the long-term economic welfare of the households after she can no longer continue to work as an ‘entertainer.’

Our observations of ‘entertainers’ raise further questions that would require systematic research. First of all, it is not still entirely clear why some daughters (families) decide to go (send) to Japan as ‘entertainers,’ while others do not. International migration generally is a very common ‘household strategy’ in Sisyua, and by now many villagers recognize the potentially large economic benefit and potential risks in this ‘entertainer’ business. Nevertheless there have been relatively few ‘entertainers’ from this village. Is it the economic cost-benefit calculation, or is it social value and reputation effects, which deters many villagers from adopting this particular “strategy”? Second question is the large difference in the amount of household support among the migrant workers; why some remit more than others? Who tend to contribute more, and why? Third is the impact of the ‘entertainer’ phenomenon on the intra-household allocation of resources and intra-household decision making processes. Are the remittances from ‘entertainers’ spent differently than incomes from male children, for example? Who decides what to do with the remittances from ‘entertainers’? Does the unprecedented high income brought in by the ‘entertainer’ give her an additional power in the household decision making? Is there an impact on the values shared among family members? The final question is the relations between the ‘entertainers’ and their families vis-a-vis other villagers. How does it affect social and economic relations among the neighbors? Is there any long-term impact on the social values shared among villagers?



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**Table 1. Summary Table of Main Characteristics of ‘Entertainers’ from Sisya**

Name	Maria B.	Christine V.	Erlinda V.	Elizabeth S.	Julita M.	Virginia M.	Margarita D.	Myra D.	Francisca C.
age as of 1994	26	22	27	24	26	22	18	24	29
age quit	not yet	not yet	22	not yet	22	not yet	not yet	not yet	not yet
trigger event	convinced by friends	convinced by friends	father's illness	convinced by friends	father's death?	father's death, friends	parent's suggestion	husband's job-loss	husband's betrayal?
age upon first trip	17 (1986)	15 (1987)	20 (1987)	19 (1989)	16 (1983)	20 (1989)	16 (1992)	24 (1994)	29 (1994)
#. of trips to Japan as of 1994	9	6	2	2	2	3	2	1	1
single?	yes	yes	no	yes	no	yes	yes	no	no
# of child	one (1994)	none	two	one (1991)	yes	no	no	yes	yes
years of schooling	8	6	10	11	12	11	8	8	12
with college education?	no	no	no	yes (drop out)	vocational	yes (drop out)	no	no	vocational
father's years of schooling	6	10	6	10	10	10	8	8	6
mother's years of schooling	6	6	6	6	10	10	4	4	6
father's occupation	tenant	tenant	ill (tenant)	owner-tenant	deceased (driver)	deceased (driver)	welder	welder	owner-tenant
mother's occupation	buy & sell	none?	vegetable sell	none?	none?	none?	handicraft	handicraft	fruit vendor
father's annual income (gross)	P15,200	P24,400	none (deceased)	P15,000 (gross)	none (deceased)	none (deceased)	P36,000	P36,000	?
family Size as of 1994	15	8	8	9	5	5	6	3?	3?
birth order /total child (among girls only)	6/12 (2/4)	1/5 (1/2)	6/13 (2/4)	1/6 (1/4)	2/7 (2/4)	5/7 (3/4)	5/8 (3/5)	3/8 (2/5)	3/5 (2/3)
#. of siblings in college	1	none	no	no	1	1	no	child no	child no
remittance (1994)/ % of her income	P100,000 66.7%	P12,500 8.8%	P42,000 in 1994	(P174,000 in 1991) 27.8%	none	P46,800 24.0%	P65,100 72.4%	none (goes to own family)	none(goes to own family)
her own income	P150,000	P142,500	none	(P625,000 in 1991)	none	P195,000	P90,000	P67,500	?
hh income (rank)	P165,200 (17)	P36,900 (198)	P50,500 (128)	P37,100 (194)**	?	P81,800 (70)	P101,100 (47)	?	?
%her income	61%*	33.9%	83.2%	0%		57.2%	64.4%		
hh income w/o her income (rank)	P15,200 (381)	P24,400 (275)	P8,500 (461)	P37,100 (194)	?	P35,000 (207)	P36,000 (198)	?	?
value of house	P350,000	P12,000	P25,000	P60,000 (unfinished)	P150,000	P150,000	P25,000	?	?
earnings spent on:	new house, house lot, edu, ag. machinery,	loan to landlord, clot hes, party	debt repayment, edu., migration	new house	?	house lot, house , edu, renovation, tricycle	store, tricycle,	own family support	own family support

\* If Maria's boyfriend's contribution is included the % HH income support becomes 90.8%.

\*\*If Elizabeth's 1991 remittance was added, the total family income would have been P211,100 with the income distribution ranking 14th among 498.

**Table 2. Comparison between Osteria (1994)'s Sample and Sisya Sample**

	Osteria (1994: 28)	Sisya
Average age	24.2	24.2
Percentage less than 25 years of age	59.1	55.6
Percentage single	81.8	55.6
Percentage with college education	46.4	22.2
Average years of schooling of father	9.2	8.2
Average years of schooling of mother	9.2	6.4
Percentage of fathers who were unemployed	53.5	33.3
percentage of mothers who were unemployed	85.8	22.2
Median Monthly Income of father	2,211	2,500?
Average Family Size	5.6	6.9
Range of Birth Order	1-2	3.6
Percentage with Siblings in College	40.9	33.3