

CHAPTER FOUR

ACHIEVING LOCAL CITIZENSHIP IN JAPAN: FILIPINA WIVES IN ORGANISED ACTIVISM

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Introduction

On 12 October 2012, the Sampaguita Association celebrated its twentieth anniversary in Yuzawa City, Akita Prefecture, in north-eastern Japan. Named after the national flower of the Philippines, the Association is a voluntary organisation dedicated to providing support for immigrant wives and international cultural exchange, and is open to both Filipino and Japanese residents of Yokote Valley in the south-eastern part of the prefecture. More than seventy people attended the formal event. Conspicuous among them were nine Filipino women in colourful Filipino dresses who stood up one by one and made a brief speech in fluent Japanese. Frequently pressing their flowing tears with their fingers, each of them stated how happy she was to witness this day that marked her long-term residence in the area they called home. Every one of them attributed her success to her family and the Association for their unwavering support. Each speech met with enthusiastic applause from the participants seated at large round tables with lavish festive food. Among them were the special guests who occupied the first and second rows of the tables, including a National Lower House member, a Prefectural Council member, the Yuzawa City mayor, the Yuzawa City Council chairman, the Yuzawa Educational Board chairman, and many other local notables. The event closed with a lively chorus of Filipino songs by the Filipinas standing arm in arm on the front of the stage.

This study begins with this memorable ceremony that highlights solidarity of the Filipino women—all married to local Japanese men—with the support of the Japanese participants, many of whom were distinguished local figures. Since the late 1980s throughout Japan, Filipino

women have married Japanese men, forming transnational families and frequently engaging in a variety of organised activism. However, over time, many organisations lost vitality or folded as members and communities changed. With its long survival and strong support from locals, the Sampaguita Association attests to the fact that this is not always the case. To find what contributes to the long life of the association in Yokote Valley, we set out to investigate with interviews, surveys, and actual participation in their community affairs. Results of the study suggest the importance of a set of themes relevant to an analysis of immigrant women's activism, including history of migration, agency of migrant women, support of locals, and policies of social incorporation—the themes that commonly underlie Asia's rising feminised migration and transnational activism. In this study, we focus on these themes by using the concept of local citizenship as social practice in everyday life in order to explain how their organised activism helped the Filipinas be recognised as legitimate members of their communities. We find that: (1) the formation of a formal association in collaboration with Japanese contributed to social recognition of the immigrant wives; (2) increasing ethnic diversity motivated local citizens and governments to promote international cultural exchange programs; and (3) Japanese language classes served as a key mechanism through which the immigrants not only learnt Japanese but also enabled trust to be built up with local citizens and authorities.

Local citizenship

The search for alternative concepts to formal citizenship has gained momentum in international migration studies when an influx of foreign workers arrived in non-traditional immigrant countries (Tsuda 2006). In post-war England, T. H. Marshall (1950) conceptualised citizenship as comprising *formal citizenship* which is what defined actual membership and *substantial citizenship* which is the contractual relationship between the state and citizens (i.e., entitlements and obligations). In a time of global migration, however, with large numbers of non-citizens residing in a territory as immigrants and refugees, such classic notions of citizenship no longer meet the reality of a nation state. In East Asia where governments are mostly concerned about economic development, permitting foreigners to work only on short-term contracts, their social incorporation into the host society is not on the national policy agenda (Seol and Shrentny 2009). Despite restrictive immigration policies, many non-citizens continue to reside in their adopted country for an extended period. Contradictions between formal and informal membership grow,

generating a vacuum of the fundamental rights protecting immigrant workers and residents. It is in this context of increasing foreign populations in East Asia that the concept of *local citizenship* has emerged as an alternative form of citizenship in order to reconcile these contradictions. Defined as “the granting, by local governments and organisations, of basic socio-political rights and services to immigrants as legitimate members of these local communities” (Tsuda 2006, 7), the concept takes into account residence, status, and participation of non-citizens in everyday community life as alternative to formal membership.

A question arises regarding the ways in which immigrants are recognised as legitimate members of, and socially incorporated into, their local communities. This question matters greatly to the marriage migrants examined here who enter the communities as spouses of Japanese citizens. Their legal residence and formal status automatically entitle them to basic rights and public services on an equal footing to the locals. Nonetheless, the local communities do not readily accept these cultural strangers as equals. For immigrant wives, the process of social incorporation is thus not only cultural adaptation but also that of political mobilisation aimed at raising public recognition. In this process, as detailed below, immigrant wives actively organise informal networks and formal associations in order to enhance their sense of belonging. In this undertaking, immigrant groups often collaborate with local citizens forming a transnational coalition and together they directly influence local policy decision-making. As such, the process of achieving local citizenship entails a two-way interaction comprising the horizontal relationships among residents of different status and the vertical relationships between authorities and residents (Siim 2000, 4). At the intersection of these two relationships, the immigrants raise public recognition while forging a sense of belonging. By engaging in the socio-political rights in this way, the immigrant wives challenge the mainstream discourse that renders them as disempowered foreign women from a “third” world country. In short, local citizenship as social practice provides a useful analytical tool in understanding the dynamic process of social incorporation in which the immigrant wives renew collective identities and accrue collective resources for social change (Shah 2012, 8). Such changes, however, occur in the context of a rapidly changing economy and demography of local communities that draw a small but steady stream of highly gendered and racialised migration from the Philippines to Japan.

Gendered and racialised migration

In the advent of the new millennium, the Philippines and Japan stand at the opposite ends of international migration. The Philippines is one of the world’s largest labour exporters while Japan is one of the world’s smallest labour importers. The Philippine government is known for its brokering role in systematically sending massive numbers of its citizens to work abroad for remitting their earnings home (Rodriguez 2010). Japan is known for its strict border control in preventing foreigners from entering, working, and settling down (e.g., Douglass and Roberts 2003; Tsuda 2003; Shipper 2008). The two countries are nonetheless tied heavily to each other through migration. Gender, class, and ethnicity play a critical role in this uneven relationship. In the Philippines, because of increasing demands for reproductive labour workers in East Asia and the Middle East, women predominate out-migration, the majority of whom work as domestic helpers (e.g., Piper and Yamanaka 2003; Parreñas 2003). In Japan, beginning in the late 1970s acute labour shortages in the sex and entertainment industry drew an influx of foreign women, a majority of whom were Filipino women (Ito 1992). Most of these women arrived in the country as “professional” entertainers or talents, but in practice they worked in bars and snacks as hostesses singing and dancing in both urban and rural areas throughout the country (Suzuki 2000; Faier 2009; Parreñas 2011).

Entering into this unequal structure is an uneven impact of the rapid industrialization and ageing population on different regions within Japan since the 1950s. While large metropolises, such as Tokyo and Osaka, have gained a net increase of population due to in-migration, peripheral regions, such as Tohoku, Hokuriku, and Sanin, have met a net decrease of population due to out-migration. A glaring outcome of this regional inequality is a vicious cycle of an accelerated ageing population and declining economic vitality in rural areas where agriculture remains the primary industry. Adding to these large structural changes over decades are changing ideas and practices of family and marriage among the younger generation who prefer modernity to tradition. In the agriculture-based rural areas where the traditional three-generation household system is still maintained, women’s preference for a modern lifestyle directly puts a set of men in a disadvantaged position in the marriage market (Naito 2004). Typically, such men include those who are the oldest sons of the families designated to not only inherit the household property and occupation but also the obligation to take care of their parents in the old age. By the mid-

1980s, a “bride shortage” phenomenon in rural areas became widely publicised by the mass media throughout Japan (e.g., Shukuya 1988).

Much is written about immigrant wives of Japanese men in rural areas since their first arrival in the 1980s (e.g., Shukuya 1988; Sato 1989; Kuwayama 1995). Most writings have focused on cultural adaptation or assimilation of these foreign women into traditional farming family life as young brides. Upon arrival, Asian wives encounter enormous pressure in the face of families’ expectations of them to become “Japanese wives” as quickly as possible. They are supposed to cast off their third world culture and identity in an effort to become a member of the “first” world modern society. Recent studies, however, turn attention to the immigrant women themselves. Instead of assuming them to be passive or vulnerable under assimilation pressure, these studies regard them as the subjects who exercise their own will and shape their life chances through migration at both origin and destination (e.g., Satake and Da-anoy 2006; Burgess 2008; Faier 2009; Takeda 2011; Saihan 2011). They acknowledge the fact that international marriage is the site of multicultural interactions where both marriage partners, as well as the families, face different cultural values and practices in everyday life. Furthermore, by recognising inequality based on their gender, ethnicity, and class, these studies shed light on women’s own interests in, and decisions about, migration from their homeland, marriage with foreign men, and raising children in their husbands’ culture and communities.

Intersection of gender, ethnicity and class

Based on their gender, ethnicity and class, immigrant women are subject to multiple forms of inequality and exploitation in the host society. By being females, women are likely assigned to reproductive labour valued low in patriarchal and capitalistic societies. By being foreign-born, immigrants are categorically treated as outsiders of the nation state who are unable to be assimilated to the majority culture. As a result, immigrant women are marginalised in the labour market, taking low-status and low-paid jobs shunned by locals, especially women. All the negative effects of their gender, ethnicity, and class, make immigrant women highly vulnerable to sexism, racism, and exploitation in the host society. Despite these superimposed layers of disadvantages, nonetheless, recent feminist literature recognises more nuanced and contextualised forms of contradictions and opportunities presented to immigrant women that reside at the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and class (Espiritu 2008; Shah 2012).

Take, for example, gendered and racialised international migration in the Asian context. As discussed above, women outnumber men in out-migration from Southeast Asia to East Asia and the Middle East (Piper and Yamanaka 2003). Despite many constraints against them, women seek employment abroad hoping to improve their own and their families’ living standards and future opportunities. In this process, women take charge of their own life by contacting labour brokers, working alone in an unfamiliar environment, and remitting their hard-won earnings to their families back home (Parreñas 2003; Rodrigues 2010; Lindquist 2010). They become not only the main breadwinners of their households, but also empower themselves with the renewed sense of pride and confidence (Yamanaka and Piper 2005). It is at this complex intersection of gender, ethnicity, and class that unexpected contradictions and opportunities are presented to them, generating a chance of turning disadvantages into advantages. In the context of the bride shortage in rural Japan, international marriage presents one such chance for immigrant women workers who are already being employed and familiar with the language and culture in the host society. By marrying local men, the women acquire a category of visa available for spouses of Japanese citizens or as a member of a Japanese family entitling them to the rights and privileges unavailable for labour migrants on contract, including access to public services and employment.

Nonetheless, immigrant wives upon marriage face a new set of challenges in marriage, family, and community. While their legal status and rights improve, they still remain vulnerable in the process of settling down based on their gender, ethnicity and class.¹ Being married to Japanese men, they are now expected to act and behave like Japanese wives, mothers, and daughters-in-law by speaking Japanese and accepting Japanese cultural norms. Explicit in this expectation is acceptance of the Japanese family system in which the new bride adopts her husband’s family’s traditions and ways of life by leaving behind those of her natal family. In the case of foreign wives, the pressure to assimilate tends to rise if she is from a less-developed country, thus forcing her to relinquish her native tongue and culture. All of these pressures can result in immigrant wives’ maladaptation causing serious cultural and psychological problems, especially in rural areas where the traditional three-generation family still exists (Kuwayama 1995). Moreover, in the case of Filipino wives, there is an additional layer of problems unique to them. Prior to marriage, the majority of Filipino women had worked as bar hostesses, drinking, singing, and dancing with, and for, their male clients. This widely prevailing image of them being bar hostesses continues to haunt them even after they are married to Japanese husbands and become mothers of

school-age children (Suzuki 2000).

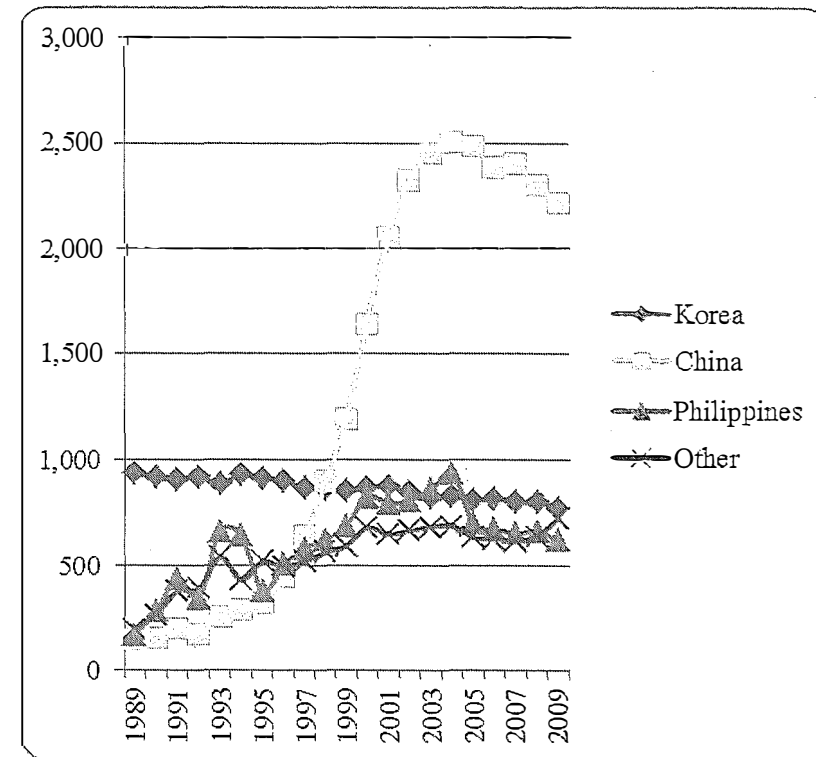
Immigrant wives in Akita

Historically agriculture, and to a lesser extent lumbering and fisheries, have dominated the economy of Akita Prefecture. Over past decades, however, because of a decline in agriculture leading to decreasing economic opportunities, the prefecture suffered heavily from out-migration. In addition, of all prefectures in Japan, Akita has the highest proportion of people aged 65 years old and over to the total population. This proportion is 30.7 percent as of 2012, and expected to reach a staggering 43.8 percent by 2040 according to government estimates (Cabinet Office, Government of Japan 2013). In 1990, Akita Prefecture had a total of over 1.22 million residents according to the national census conducted that year. But the figure has gone down to 1.05 million as of 2013 according to an estimate provided by the prefecture. Recently the prefecture has been losing its population at a rate of about one percent of its population every year, which is the highest rate of net population decrease among Japan's 47 prefectures. Further, a national research institute has recently released predictions that the prefecture will lose more than 1/3 of its population by 2040, as compared to 2010 (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research 2013). This predicted decline is also the highest among all the prefectures.

In the context of Akita's precipitous population decline, it is significant to note that the numbers of foreign residents rapidly grew from the late 1980s to the early 2000s. As shown in Figure 4-1, three nationalities accounted for this increase: Korean, Filipino, and Chinese. Of the three, the majority of the Koreans are descendants of pre-WWII colonial immigrants from the Korean Peninsula most of whom were "Special Permanent Residents". The other two nationalities were newcomers, the majority of whom were women married to local men. Up to the late 1980s, international marriage was rare in the Tohoku region. However, as the bride shortage became so severe as to threaten the very survival of rural communities, international marriage attracted the attention of individuals, families, and even policymakers. Consequently, the number of international marriages skyrocketed. In 1975, six prefectures in the Tohoku Region had only a total of 134 international marriages. In 2005, this number went up nearly 15 times to 1,945 (Takeda 2011, 65). In the case of Filipinas, the highly gendered and racialised migration as discussed above led to an unexpected (or expected) result: a rapid increase in the number of Filipina-Japanese marriages. Frequently, couples met in the bars, fell in

love, and tied the knot. In Akita, Filipinas arrived in two waves. In 1989, their number was 169, quadrupling to 642 in 1994. After a sharp drop in the mid-1990s, the number quickly picked up again to reach 825 in 2000, peaking at 939 in 2004. Since then throughout the late 2000s, the number stayed in the 600s. In contrast, the increase of the Chinese population, which included students and trainees as well as brides, was dramatic. In the early 1990s, their total number was in the 100s, but ten years later it grew to more than 2,000, peaking at 2,507 in 2004. After that year it declined somewhat but stayed at more than 2,200 throughout the 2000s. Unlike Filipinas, Chinese wives arrived through pre-arranged marriages by matchmakers, and as a result, their marriages are reported to suffer from many serious problems, a topic unexplored in this study.²

Figure 4-1: The number of foreign residents in Akita Prefecture, 1989 to 2009



Source: Bureau of International and Academic Affairs, Akita Prefecture, 2010.

Research methods

This study focuses on Filipino women residing in the southern region of Akita Prefecture, more specifically the Yokote Valley, home to an estimated several hundreds of Filipino and other nationality women, mostly Chinese. They and their transnational families live throughout the Valley, scattered around the two major cities, Yokote and Yuzawa, and many other smaller towns and villages such as Ogachi and Omagari. According to Yokote City (2013), in 2011 the city alone hosted a total of 102 registered Filipinos, of whom 62 held “permanent residents” visas and 23 the “spouses of Japanese” visas. Adding to the unknown numbers of those living in many neighbouring municipalities, the total number of Filipinas in the Yokote Valley would easily exceed 200 as of 2013.

The present study began in June 2012 when the Akita International University (AIU) and the University of California, Berkeley (UCB) launched a joint project to provide a six-week course on international migration for a class of selected students from both universities. The course is scheduled to take place in UCB and AIU in the summer of the year 2014. As part of preparation for the course, the authors began preliminary research on international marriage migration in the Yokote Valley in June 2012. From then until July 2013, we conducted interviews with the area’s public officials, Japanese language teachers, and leaders of the Filipino wives’ communities. In October 2012, we also attended the twentieth anniversary of the Sampaguita Association as described at the beginning of this chapter. Over the year we gradually became acquainted with many Filipino women living in the Valley. Since January 2013, with these Filipinas’ cooperation, we distributed a two-page questionnaire in the places where they congregated, including their private homes and a Catholic Church. By July 2013, a total of 15 questionnaires were returned to us. Although the small number does not permit us to generalise the results to a wider population, it still provides us with valuable information about the Valley’s Filipino women regarding their demographics, migration, family life, and daily activities, to which we now turn.

Filipino-Japanese couples

The survey, with a total of 15 Filipinas, reveals that they arrived in two waves: in the early 1990s and the early 2000s (see Table 1). This is consistent with the statistics on foreign residents at the prefectural level as discussed above. Ten of the 15 came between 1987 and 1996, whereas the remaining five came between 2000 and 2010. Demographics of the two

arrivals indicate that the two groups constitute two separate age groups. The earlier-arrived group is characterised by the older average age at 45.6 years and larger number of children, with an average of 2.2 born to them. A high proportion, eight out of ten, is married to husbands who are the first sons of the family and, thus seven out of ten live with at least one parent-in-law in their households. Of the ten women, one is divorced and one is widowed. In contrast, the later-arriving group is much younger in age at 33.8 years on the average with a smaller average number of children, at one child only. All but one of the five recent arrivals are currently married, but only two live with their husbands’ parents in the same households.

Despite their different stages in the family lifecycle, the two age groups of Filipinas have other important demographic, socioeconomic, and political characteristics in common. Most conspicuously, their Japanese husbands are on the average more than ten years older than they are (wives being 41.9 years old vs. husbands who are 55.1 years old). But in education, wives from the Philippines are much better educated than their Japanese husbands. Specifically, eight of the 15 wives had more than two years of college education; four had high school education; and three had vocational training. Of the 15 husbands, only two have received more than two years of college education, the majority, eight, are high school graduates, and five went to vocational school.³ These Filipino women and Japanese men commonly met at the women’s workplaces (i.e., bars and snack bars) where they worked as professional entertainers, with the exception of six couples encountered at other sites. Despite their long-term residence, most Filipino wives, except for two, kept their Filipino citizenship staying in Japan as long-term residents. Outside the Philippines and Japan, they have relatives living in the United States, Australia, Europe, the Middle East, and elsewhere, revealing their transnational connections.

Table 4-1: Selected demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of wives and husbands

Selected Characteristics	Wife			Husband
	All	Early Arrival	Recent Arrival	All
	Number	Number	Number	Number
Year of Arrival				
1985 to 1989	3	3	0	n/a
1990 to 1994	6	6	0	n/a
1995 to 1999	1	1	0	n/a
2000 to 2004	1	0	1	n/a
2005 to 2010	4	0	4	n/a
Total	15	10	5	n/a
Occupation at Arrival				
Entertainer	9	7	2	n/a
Other	6	3	3	n/a
Total	15	10	5	n/a
Age				
25-29	1	0	1	0
30-39	4	0	4	0
40-49	8	8	0	3
50-59	2	2	0	8
60-69	0	0	0	3
70-79	0	0	0	1
Total	15	10	5	15
Average Age	41.9	45.6	33.8	55.1
Education				
4 Year College or More	5	3	2	1
2 Year College	3	1	2	1
High School	4	3	1	8
Vocational School	3	3	0	5
Total	15	10	5	15
Number of Children				
0	1	0	1	n/a
1	6	3	3	n/a
2	4	3	1	n/a
3	3	3	0	n/a
4	1	1	0	n/a
Total	15	10	5	n/a
Average Number of Children	1.8	2.2	1	n/a

Selected Characteristics	Wife			Husband
	All	Early Arrival	Recent Arrival	All
Husband Is First Son				
Yes	10	8	2	n/a
No	5	2	3	n/a
Total	15	10	5	n/a
Living with Husband's Parent				
Yes	9	7	2	n/a
No	6	3	3	n/a
Total	15	10	5	n/a
Wife's Current Occupation				
Housewife	6	4	2	n/a
Business	2	2	0	n/a
Employee	5	2	3	n/a
English Teacher	2	2	0	n/a
Total	15	10	5	n/a
Husband's Occupation				
Auto-related	n/a	n/a	n/a	3
Factory Worker	n/a	n/a	n/a	3
Carpenter, Electrician	n/a	n/a	n/a	3
Company Employee	n/a	n/a	n/a	3
Business	n/a	n/a	n/a	1
Medical	n/a	n/a	n/a	1
Other	n/a	n/a	n/a	1
Total	n/a	n/a	n/a	15

In the areas of private and public life, these Filipino wives are very active. Upon marriage, almost all have raised or are raising children, while taking employment on and off. They work in factories, hotels, and other service establishments. Others with professional skills are self-employed teaching English or dance classes. Their husbands work in a variety of occupations as mechanics in automobile-related jobs, electricians, carpenters, business owners, and company employees. Almost all of these wives took or are currently taking a Japanese language class, self-rating their speaking ability as four or five out of a scale of one to seven. Their relative confidence in Japanese explains the fact that 11 of the 15 informants possess a Japanese driver's license, which is an accomplishment itself and crucial to enhancing geographical mobility for themselves and their families in the rural areas. In their community life, as parents, neighbours, and women, they have belonged to the Parent Teacher Association, the Neighbourhood Association, or the Women's Association. In their religious life, as Catholics, all Filipinas participate or have participated in a Sunday mass at the local church. Some use their spare time to volunteer

for church maintenance. In their private life, whenever they have a free time, these women get together with other Filipinas to celebrate birthdays, to sing in Karaoke bars, or to simply chat in their native tongue.

Organised activism for local citizenship

In the sections that follow, based on our research and the existing literature, we analyse Filipino wives' organized activism intended to increase public recognition as legitimate members of their local communities.⁴ Our data suggest that their collective activism heightened during the first half of the 1990s in which the early arrival group was in the midst of raising their first and second child. This indicates that the volume and intensity of the women's collective actions vary over time according to their stage of their family lifecycle on the one hand, and the changing socio-political landscape of local communities as a result of their arrival since the late 1980s on the other.

It was then not coincidental in the 1990s that throughout Japan there was a growing interest in international cultural exchange often supported by local administrations (Abe 1995). Until then, it had been educated upper class citizens and their organisations that enjoyed the privilege of interacting with foreign nationals through sister city and educational programs. By the early 1990s, however, the new trends of cultural exchange began spreading to the grassroots. The "internal internationalisation" (*uchinaru kokusaika*) was the catchphrase referring to an increasing public awareness of ethnic diversity within Japan (Hatsuse 1993). It was this period that saw an influx of guest workers and marriage migrants arriving in regions that until then had never hosted large numbers of foreigners except Korean permanent residents. In response, citizens' volunteer groups engaged in a variety of activities to assist immigrants with cultural, legal, medical, and other programs (Grabum, Ertl, and Tierney 2008; Yamanaka 2012). Similarly, many local governments launched their own innovative programs addressing internationalisation at the grassroots (Tegtmeyer Pak 2003; Haig 2009; Ertl 2008).

Similarly, in understanding immigrant women's collective activism, it is important to take into account the history of gendered and racialised migration in which immigrant women arrived as independent workers on short-term contracts. Contrary to the submissive image of women following in the steps of their male relatives, these Filipino women were agents of their own action choosing employment abroad away from home. Working in Japan, Filipina entertainers formed a comforting ethnic enclave in which they maintained their Filipino identity. Upon marriage,

however, each woman's life environment changed drastically. She was no longer with other Filipinas but was instead left alone with her Japanese husband and in-laws in their private home. There she was the only "internal other" (Ogaya 2004, 33) surrounded by Japanese who spoke only Japanese. An intense loneliness in the early stage of settlement eased when she met other Filipina wives in town, networking and becoming friends with them.

In the early 1990s, as many more Filipinas married Japanese and settled down in both urban and rural areas, there was a surge of Filipino organisations aimed at consolidating unity and enhancing rights throughout the country. Over time the informal networks frequently developed into a formal association with specific objectives, leaders, and structures. These organisations vary in history, goals, membership, leadership, and relationships with local citizens and governments, but it is possible to classify their activities into the eight main categories according to the existing studies (Ogaya 2004; Sadamatsu 2004). These are: (1) self-help and social networks; (2) support and consultation; (3) Japanese language class; (4) Japanese and Filipino cultural events; (5) local volunteer activities; (6) recreation and leisure activities; (7) charity activities for Filipino causes; and (8) funding campaigns.

The proliferation of Filipino associations in Japan is not surprising given the fact that Filipinos work and live in every part of the world but they are well connected to each other through extensive networks and organised activism (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Parreñas 2003). As women comprising the majority of the Philippine's "transmigrants" (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994), Filipinas engage in a variety of activities at their destinations. In such a place as Hong Kong where public organizing is tolerated for immigrant workers, Filipinas mobilize their compatriots for political and economic goals (Yamanaka and Piper 2005). Behind their active transnational networking and activism is the Philippines's long history of civil and political movements for democracy including feminist movements (Silliman and Noble 1998).

It is in this global and domestic context that Filipinos overseas, including the wives in this study, are motivated to empower themselves by organising public activities. In the case of Filipinas in the Yokote Valley, when the early arrival group came in the late 1980s, they found very few Filipinas in the region. These pioneers were loosely connected with one another through networks at churches, employment, schools, and other places. However, no matter how helpful these informal networks were at the personal level, they were limited in their capacity and power in solving problems arising from cultural differences and institutional barriers they

met every day. Many wives felt that they needed a formal association that would address their common problems in more systematic and resourceful ways than informal networks ever could.

Learning about a plan to establish such an association among the Filipinas, Miyako Miyahara, the manager of a snack bar where some Filipinas worked, became interested in helping them (Asahi Shimbun 1993a). After a few months' preparation, in April 1992, Miyahara and her collaborators successfully launched the Association in a hotel in Yuzawa City with the attendance of 30 Japanese and Filipino members (Akita Sakigake Shimbun 1992; Yomiuri Shimbun 1992). This was the beginning of the Sampaguita Association that would celebrate its twentieth anniversary in October 2012. Aiming at promoting cultural exchange and friendship between Japan and the Philippines (Association Bylaws 2 and 3), the Association selected Hisako Ogawa, known for her dedication in international exchange, and Hideo Suga, a Yuzawa City public official, as the president and the vice-president, respectively. In addition, 12 members, including two Filipino-Japanese couples, agreed to serve as the board of directors. Once in place, in the next few years, the Association grew larger with more than eighty members actively participating in a variety of organised activities. These included: supporting Japanese language courses; holding an annual Christmas party for cultural exchange; selling Filipino goods and crafts at the annual summer festival; collecting used clothes for charity in the Philippines; inviting parents from the Philippines; and organising funding campaigns for future programs (Akita Sakigake Shimbun 1993a, 1993b). As these activities drew large crowds, the local news media publicised them referring to increasing ethnic diversity and growing multiculturalism in Akita Prefecture (Kahoku Shimpo 1993; Asahi Shimbun 1993b).

Japanese language classes

Of all the activities in which the Sampaguita Association had engaged in the Yokote Valley since its inception, Japanese language classes proved to be most beneficial to the Filipino members. As described in the introduction to this chapter, in her speech at the Association's anniversary ceremony, every Filipino woman emphasised the importance of learning Japanese for them to develop a sense of belonging to the community. The growing need for Japanese language education was particularly urgent for wives with children reaching school age and those who lived with ageing in-laws who spoke only Japanese. In the rural areas where public

transportation is limited, passing the drivers' license examination in Japanese was imperative for their own and family's geographical mobility.

In the early 1990s when Yokote Valley witnessed an increasing number of marriage migrants, the Sampaguita President Hisako Ogawa found it necessary for the local government to sponsor Japanese language classes for the new arrivals. Before her presidency, Ogawa had long served as the main officer for the Yuzawa Branch of the Women's Association to Promote International Exchange (WAPIE). In the past, she and her colleagues travelled to many foreign countries on international cultural exchange programs. With growing ethnic diversity in their city as a result of the immigrant wives' arrival, the WAPIE officers turned their attention to an internal internationalization project. The Yuzawa municipal government was responsive to the WAPIE's proposal to host a Japanese language course in partnership with the organisation, the Sampaguita Association, and the Akita International Association (AIA). The first Japanese language class began in 1992 with an instructor commuting from Akita City. Next year the Yokote Branch of WAPIE followed suit, opening its own Japanese language class.⁵ As these classes succeeded in drawing students of diverse nationalities in these cities, demands for more resources to expand the programs and secure trained teachers increased (Sasaki and Miyamoto 1997). In 1995, to meet such demands from the citizens' groups, the Akita Prefectural government adopted the Japanese language program under its wing. After six years of expansion and revision, the prefectural government in 2001 entrusted the responsibility of running Japanese language classes to the local governments of the cities and towns with a high demand for the classes, many of which continue to today.

In Yokote Valley, Filipina wives, many of whom were leading members of the Sampaguita Association, continued to attend Japanese language classes available in their localities. In contrast, members' participation in other activities declined significantly over time reflecting changes in their cultural integration and family lifecycles.⁶ Today the Association meets only once a year to celebrate Christmas with Filipino cultural shows, which still draw large numbers of Filipinos and Japanese including elite citizens (Akita Sakigake Shimbun 2011). As the survey results show, however, in their daily lives, the Filipina wives are active participants in events and programs organised by local communities including the Parent Teacher Associations, the Neighbourhood Associations, and other institutions. The Filipinas are now well accepted as legitimate members of these organisations.

Conclusion

This study of Filipina wives of Japanese men in Yokote Valley demonstrates the importance of organised activism as social practice for them to achieve social recognition of their communities. In the period of increasing ethnic diversity in rural Japan where multiculturalism is yet to arrive, immigrant activism in collaboration with local citizens has served two major goals: enhancing these wives' rights to be included in the communities and raising public awareness for growing cultural differences within the communities. In the absence of a national policy of social incorporation, local governments are responsive to such grassroots activism intended to increase sociocultural integration of the immigrants. They accommodated the Japanese language courses as part of their internal internationalisation projects. For the Filipina wives, participation in such classes is also the process of reconstructing their collective identity as trustworthy partners in the local communities that once looked down upon them as bar hostesses from a less developed country. By actively engaging in organised activism in everyday life, be it learning Japanese in classrooms or dancing and singing Filipino songs in the annual Christmas Party, the immigrant wives have challenged the deep-seated stigma and prejudice in Japanese hierarchy based on nationality, gender, and class. In so doing, they have renewed a sense of belonging while contributing to emerging multiculturalism and social justice for all.

Although this study presents a success story of social incorporation of immigrant wives into local communities, it also exemplifies a case of a nation in denial of the fact that growing numbers of immigrants reside, work and raise families in the territory without formal citizenship. In the absence of social incorporation policies at the national level, local governments implement their own policies, such as Japanese language programs, in the name of international cultural exchange. In the time of rapid ageing and precipitous population decline in many rural prefectures, such as Akita, this is not only vastly inadequate to boost social incorporation, but also it is unjustifiable to treat long-term residents as temporary foreign guests. As shown in this study, an arrival of a large number of immigrants, especially marriage migrants, has been a blessing to many small towns and villages of these prefectures that would have otherwise lost social and economic vitality. Upon arrival, these foreigners become family members, local residents, productive workers, and potential future citizens. In short, instead of turning a blind eye to the reality, it is time for Japan as a nation to develop a comprehensive policy of immigrant incorporation at both national and local levels. Toward this

goal, the collaborative and reciprocal relationships among immigrants, citizens, and administrations in the Yokote Valley suggest a promise for expanding local citizenship rights to long-term immigrants based on residence and participation.

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Notes

1. For cultural and legal problems that Filipino women face in their marriage and family in Japan, see Sadamatsu (2002).
2. For studies of Chinese marriage migrant women in rural Japan, see Saihan (2011).
3. The gap in educational attainment between Filipina wives and Japanese husbands may be a result of the structural inequality between Japan and the Philippines, attracting diverse class backgrounds of Filipino women, including a group of relatively resourceful Filipino women, to migrate to Japan. For discussions on global hypergamy, see Constable (2005).
4. Information in the next two sections is drawn from personal interviews with Filipino and Japanese members of the Sampaguita Association, Japanese language teachers, local government officials, local citizens, newspaper and magazine articles, and academic publications.
5. In the Yokote class, the administration provided a childcare program so that immigrant mothers would concentrate on language lessons.
6. The existing studies also report diminished frequency of organized activism or even disappearance of organisations among Filipino wives in Japan (Ogaya 2004; Sadamatsu 2004).

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