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Shun Ohno

Transforming Nikkeijin Identity and Citizenship: Untold Life Histories of Japanese Migrants and Their Descendants in the Philippines, 1903–2013

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Transforming Nikkeijin Identity and Citizenship: Untold Life Histories of Japanese Migrants and Their Descendants in the Philippines, 1903–2013

Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2015. 284 pages.

Shun Ohno's involvement with the Nikkeijin—overseas Japanese migrants and their descendants—in the Philippines spans about three decades now, beginning with his work as the Manila correspondent for a Japanese newspaper in the eighties. Ohno's stories about the Philippine Nikkeijin, published in the national daily *Mainichi Shimbun* in 1987, argued that Japan had a responsibility toward these people who suffered and continued to suffer from Japan's invasion of the Philippines during the Second World War. A series of such articles led to greater public and political interest in their plight and eventually to the recognition that the Japanese government had to provide them assistance and opportunities. Ohno's book, therefore, is the culmination of a very long engagement not only with the matter of Nikkeijin citizenship, but also with the men and women who have had to grapple with and negotiate their identities as well as the complicated legal processes involved in claiming their Japanese citizenship.

Ohno argues that identity and citizenship are flexibly constructed by both individuals and interested states (the Philippines and Japan) within a changing sociopolitical and economic landscape, as seen in the unfolding of citizenship issues across three generations of Nikkeijin based in various cities in the Philippines and, for some of them, in their move to Japan. By focusing on the development of identity and citizenship issues across three generations, using data collected for over a decade (from the late 1980s to the mid-2000s) from a large set of life histories and quantitative surveys, Ohno makes a unique contribution to the literature on Japanese migration to the Philippines, which hitherto has focused on the prewar period and relied on official documents and diplomatic records.

The book starts by locating its place within the large body of studies on the Nikkeijin in the Philippines and elsewhere. The main body is structured chronologically, with each chapter focusing on a specific historical period, beginning with the exploration of job and business opportunities in the Philippines during the early 1900s by first-generation Japanese migrants,

or Issei, to their marriage to local women; the establishment of Japanese schools for the education of Nisei, the second generation of overseas Japanese migrants, up to the early 1940s; the turbulence of wartime occupation and postwar recovery; and the struggle for recognition and recompense up to the present. For each period Ohno provides a richly detailed account of the lives of the Nikkeijin based on his interviews, documentary evidence, and official statistics. The accounts speak of the diversity of the group—Ohno is careful not to generalize or homogenize the Nikkeijin, whose identities are complicated by their ethnic background (e.g., as Japanese mainlander, Japanese Okinawan, lowland Filipino, indigenous Filipino), religious background, and social class or occupation. The accounts also highlight the divisions that exist in Filipino society—between lowland Christianized Filipinos and indigenous Filipinos, between the poor working class and rich landed class, between the political and economic center of power (i.e., Manila) and those in the peripheries. These conditions, together with economic and political upheavals in and between Japan and the Philippines, provide the complex backdrop against which the Nikkeijin alternately performed, disowned, and reclaimed their identities and citizenship as Japanese. Ohno also pays close attention to the enormous role that pillars of civil society played. He describes how educational institutions, religious groups, Japanese and Philippine media, and nongovernment organizations or associations actively participated in shaping the discourse on Nikkeijin identity and citizenship and reconfiguring the relationships of obligation and responsibility between the Japanese state and individual Nikkeijin. The book also brings into the analysis the many changes in the context in which identity and citizenship are negotiated—the shift in Japanese state consciousness from militarization to globalization, the view of migration as voluntary or forced (depending on the political and economic situation), and the development of new views on citizenship and national identity—not only as matters of political and cultural allegiance but also as matters of economic opportunity. The concluding chapter summarizes Ohno's main findings on the relationship between the Philippine Nikkeijin's identity and citizenship and the policies of Japanese and Philippine governments; it also draws connections between these findings and the larger, global Nikkei community, Philippine society, and Japanese society.

Looking at the complex interweaving of individual lives and social forces, Ohno finds that national identity is co-constructed by individual

Nikkeijin and Philippine and Japanese societies. Certain circumstances (e.g., Japanese and Philippine policies on citizenship, differences in opportunities for citizens and aliens, and the war and its aftermath), together with the need to protect their own and their families' interests, led the Nikkeijin to take on one identity or another. The views of Filipinos (again, not a homogenous group in Ohno's discussion) of the Nikkeijin were generally shaped by the hardship and cruelty of wartime experiences, but also colored by preexisting biases prior to the war, stemming from the economic threat that the Issei and their families posed to Filipinos and what the Filipino public perceived to be ambivalence or aloofness of the Nikkeijin toward Filipino society. Efforts at reconciliation from the Japanese government (in the form of Official Development Assistance) helped to change popular discourse regarding the Japanese from being cruel, unjust colonizers to technologically advanced and sincere partners in development (112–15).

Decades after the war, with the reinstitution of friendly relations between Japan and the Philippines and the surge in Japan's economic growth, many Nikkeijin began to negotiate their identity with Japan in order to claim their rights as its citizens. In Philippine popular discourse the Nikkeijin were portrayed consistently as war crime perpetrators, but the Nikkeijin had to argue to the Japanese state that they were war victims (145–46) and deserved assistance. However, Japan's needs (the domination of the Philippines either through military invasion or economic invasion, and the domestic labor shortages in the 1990s) have more powerfully determined whether the Nikkeijin in the Philippines would be recognized as such and granted certain rights or privileges as was their due. Japan granted the Nikkeijin recognition as Japanese citizens mainly so that their labor could serve Japan's interests—for example, as *gunzoku* (Japanese paramilitary personnel during the war) or as laborers during the economic boom in the 1990s. In response to changing political, economic, and social conditions and in order to protect their own and their children's interests, the Nikkeijin have negotiated complicated bureaucratic pathways to erase, disguise, or reclaim their Japanese identities.

The strength of Ohno's project is in his use of multiple sources, especially the stories of the Nikkeijin themselves. These voices illuminate the issue of identity and citizenship among the Nikkeijin and frame it as a matter of dignity, of belonging, and the pursuit of an opportunity for a decent living for oneself and one's children. They humanize and complicate our

understanding of citizenship that is often reduced to blood, bureaucratically demonstrable by one's Japanese lineage through the *koseki*, the family register listing its members, kept in the municipality.

One shortcoming of the book, however, is evident when Ohno treads into quantitative data based on his surveys, presenting tables for findings from a rather small sample size of about twenty individuals (164). While the data are remarkable in that they show notions of identity and belongingness from the same people at two different points in time (1987 and 2002), such a small size, obtained through convenience sampling, cannot be taken to represent the experiences of the Philippine Nikkeijin. And while Ohno makes no claims at generalizing, and in fact supplements the discussion of the responses to the questionnaire with data from interviews with these same participants, the manner of presentation may be taken to suggest that the patterns found in the sample exist for the larger group.

Another shortcoming apparent to me as one who has an interest in women's experiences of migration is the surprising lack of commentary on the gendered dimension of identity and citizenship. Ohno's data point to migration and the pursuit of identity as a gendered experience (e.g., more Japanese men than women migrating to the Philippines prior to the war; the establishment in Mintal, Davao City, of a Japanese girls' high school that taught Japanese and mestiza girls to become good brides; the greater availability during the economic boom of low-paid factory and construction jobs typically for men; the Filipina Nikkeijin's discomfort at the term "Japayuki-san" being applied to Filipinas working in Japan; and the opportunity to obtain a *koseki* being available to Nikkeijin men but not women). However, he does not utilize gender as a lens to analyze engagements with and negotiations for Japanese identity and citizenship.

All in all the book is a well-nuanced portrait of the complexities of identity formation and citizenship of the Nikkeijin in the Philippines. Despite the shortcomings identified, it remains a valuable contribution to scholarly, empirical work on the Nikkeijin in the Philippines, painstakingly crafted from data collected over many years across many different locations and several generations of the Nikkeijin. Ohno's work can serve not only as a good resource for scholars and advocates who seek a well-grounded analysis of the Philippine Nikkeijin's struggle for identity and state recognition, but also as a map leading to new areas (for instance, looking at identity and citizenship from a gender perspective; exploring notions of citizenship and

home for the Nissei and Sansei, third-generation migrants, who are now living in Japan) for further study in this yet-to-be concluded engagement with Japanese identity and citizenship.

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SOON CHUAN YEAN

Tulong: An Articulation of Politics in Christian Philippines

Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2015. 275 pages.

The author, Soon Chuan Yeon, is a Malaysian political scientist based at the Universiti Sains Malaysia with research interests in local and cultural politics “from below” in Malaysia and the Philippines. The book grew out of his doctoral thesis submitted to the Department of Southeast Asian Studies, National University of Singapore. Because Soon was supervised by the eminent Filipino historian Reynaldo Ileto, the book is arguably yet another elaboration of the long-standing concerns of his mentor.

In 2001 Ileto had thrown down the gauntlet at scholars imbibing an Orientalist mode of interpreting and representing Philippine politics. With the scholarship of the influential American political scientist Carl Lande serving as the paradigmatic example, Ileto (“Orientalism and the Study of Philippine Politics,” *Philippine Political Science Journal* 2001:1–32, p. 28) observed “how a certain kind of politics, which is really never understood from within, gets to be constructed as a negative ‘other’ of the Euro-American post-Enlightenment political tradition.” By positing an impervious binary of “personal versus public” and “personal versus impersonal,” these so-called Orientalist scholars depict the “peculiar” nature of Philippine politics as an undesirable confounding of these two domains. More to the point, studies on Philippine politics and society have been stereotypically portrayed in terms of instrumentalist patron–client relationships animated by the shared cultural values of *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude) and *hiya* (shame) but deployed in an hierarchical register.

Soon’s rendition of the “everyday politics” of Barangay Angeles, a lowland settlement situated close to the shores of Lake Taal and a short distance away