



SUMMARY REPORT



SOCIAL ECONOMICS OF TRANSNATIONAL DISASTER AID: FILIPINOS IN HIROSHIMA

GLEND A BONIFACIO
WOMEN AND GENDER STUDIES
April 4, 2023

INTRODUCTION

In the Spring of 2020, I secured a Prentice Institute Seed Grant to conduct a research project entitled *Gender and the Economics of Disaster Aid: Transnational Flows Between Japan and the Philippines*. The world was gripped by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic since March 2020 with stringent travel restrictions in place around the world to ensure the containment of the virus. After more than two years of public health protocols related to travel, Canada ended all border restrictions in October 2022. Japan similarly followed. It is within this social environment of travel anxiety, physical distancing, and mandatory face mask use in public places that the research project was conducted in Hiroshima, Japan in the summer of 2022. This summary report deals with the thematic input from the field data. A detailed analysis of the findings will be published in the future.

Research Questions

Two questions guided the study:

1. What are the economic activities participated in by Filipinos in Japan to contribute towards disaster aid to the Philippines?
2. What is the role of gender in the transnational flows of goods and remittances geared towards disaster aid from Japan to the Philippines?

Research Locale

Japan is a favoured destination for Filipino workers and students since the 1980s. The Japan-Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement (JPEPA) concluded in 2008 and the Specific Skilled Worker Visa (*tokuteigino*) which started in 2019 have increased the number of Filipino skilled workers and professionals in Japan's shrinking labour force and aging population. Filipinos comprised the third largest group of foreigners in Japan with 251,934 in 2017 (Osaki and Masangkay 2018).

Hiroshima is in the Chugoku region. Hiroshima City was destroyed by the first atomic bomb in 1945 during the Second World War. The Genbaku Dome (Hiroshima Peace Memorial) is a visible reminder of the tragedy of human lives lost and the massive destruction of communities. Filipinos in Hiroshima comprised the study group for this

project. In 1996, there were 4,400 Filipinos in Hiroshima, Fukuoka, and Okayama (Anderson 2005). By 2018, there were 7,461 Filipinos in Hiroshima alone (Ministry of Justice 2018). The fieldwork was conducted in various places in Hiroshima Prefecture covering the city and outlying areas such as Higashihiroshima and Kure.

Methods of Data Collection

This study utilized key informant interviews, focus group discussions, institutional ethnography, and field observations of Filipino community events. Five interviews with selected Filipino community leaders and five interviews with Filipino students were completed in a span of two months using snowball sampling. Because the Filipino community in Hiroshima is relatively small compared to its counterparts in metropolitan Tokyo or Osaka, the recruitment of participants through word of mouth and referrals seemed convenient for the study under an atmosphere of pandemic anxiety. All interviews were conducted online on Zoom or by Messenger on Facebook. Furthermore, two online focus groups with three participants each were conducted during the same period based on the same system of snowball sampling. Institutional ethnography refers to data collected about the Filipino community organizations in Hiroshima that were complemented by observation of community events.

Limitations of the Study

As noted earlier, the study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic with strict public health protocols in place in Canada and Japan. Travel to and from places seemed compromised by the fear of some participants meeting in person or meeting someone from Canada for introductions. The time consumed in exchanging email correspondence and communicating with potential participants during fieldwork affected the capacity to find more potential Filipino participants. Selected community events that fit into the fieldwork schedule were prioritized, thus, missing other events to observe in the community. While Hiroshima is accessible by train and public transportation, the travel time to meet potential participants in community settings was hampered by conflicts in schedule and physical fatigue.

MAIN FINDINGS

Social Economics of Transnational Disaster Aid

This summary pertains to the social economics of transnational disaster aid between Japan and the Philippines by Filipinos in Hiroshima. Social economics is a subfield of economics that deals with the relationships between economic activity and social behaviour (Beck and Murphy 2000), in this case, disaster aid by Filipinos in Hiroshima. Transnational disaster aid refers to any goods and monies sent to the home country by residents of that country living abroad like immigrants or migrant workers. The major findings from the qualitative data are set out in the thematic ideas outlined below. These themes were prominent in the interview narratives and focus group sessions.

Female-led economic activities

Of the 282,000 Filipinos in Japan as of 2020, 70% were women (Timog BBS). Accordingly, the economic activities geared toward disaster aid or disaster philanthropy were led by Filipino women in Hiroshima. Filipino women hugely outnumber Filipino men in all aspects of fundraising in the community.

Active Filipino organizations yet invisible

There are two major Filipino organizations in Hiroshima at the time of the fieldwork. This means that these two organizations have been largely identified by the participants in the study. These are the Filipino Association (HFA) and the Filipino Catholic Community of Noboricho (FCCN). Another organization that comprises selected Filipinos and Japanese is the Hiroshima Philippines Friendship Society (HPFS), however, this group is led by a Japanese with projects, including disaster aid, to the Philippines. In Hiroshima, the HFA and FCCN are active in the community but are only known mostly by Filipinos and their associated networks.

Church-based networks

Economic activities such as selling goods to benefit disaster-affected areas in the Philippines prominently start with church-based networks in Hiroshima. Catholic

churches in Hiroshima serve as conduits for spreading volunteerism among Filipino parishioners to benefit the Philippines.

Reactive fundraising activities after disasters with targeted beneficiaries

Filipinos engage in economic activities in the informal economy to raise funds after disasters occur in the Philippines. The informal economy occurs within the church premises for the sale of goods, delicacies, and others for a charitable cause. Beneficiaries of disaster aid are targeted and specific in the Philippines with familiar contacts in the Filipino community in Hiroshima.

Traditional and creative ways to secure donations

The Philippines experiences an average of twenty typhoons every year (Murga 2022). Disasters occur with the lack of resources to cope with the onset of natural hazards coupled with the impact on vulnerable communities. Thus, disasters are commonplace in different parts of the country. Filipinos and Filipino community organizations in Hiroshima tend to work together to respond after natural calamities destroy life and infrastructure. Traditional and creative ways to raise funds and donations demonstrate solidarity and support to those affected in the Philippines. Traditional methods include donations after mass service and private solicitations among friends and co-workers. Creative ways of securing monies for disaster aid include selling home-baked delicacies and posting notices in the workplace and on social media like Facebook.

Filipino Socialities

Socialities refer to developing social ties and linkages in communities. This is made cogent by Filipinos in diaspora in a society that gives primacy to the homogeneity of practices and language use like Japan. However, there are certain attributes of Filipino socialities in Hiroshima that could factor into disaster aid as follows.

Collective Filipino culture

Filipinos come from a collectivist culture in the Philippines, where family and kinship networks including affiliated groups in the community stand paramount in daily living. The patronage system inherited in the colonial past is still evinced in spaces of

interactions. Necessarily the collectivist social milieu lends a broad social network that comes in handy in mobilizing economic pursuits for disaster aid.

Culture and resilience

Japan is considered a place of respectful people, but it does not mean it is a welcoming place for Filipinos. Filipino participants claim that Japanese society is 'isolating' with language barriers, access to resources, and less camaraderie with Japanese co-workers. Under a social environment of assimilation, Filipinos tend to develop resilience from their cultural habits of community volunteerism, self-help groups, and mutuality of concerns. But they rely on a few Japanese associates with whom they can seek financial support toward disaster aid. Cultivating trust is important in Japanese society, and Filipinos find it difficult to sustain longer contact with the Japanese before it is recognized.

Filipino identity

Unlike in North America with diverse ethnolinguistic groupings, Filipinos in Hiroshima tend to be united under a Filipino identity. There are fewer Filipinos in regional prefectures like Hiroshima, and this contributes to working together for a cause, especially a disaster aid.

Nihongo social capital

A very interesting finding of the study is the use of Nihongo as social capital to mediate between Japanese and Filipinos in Hiroshima. As a precondition of employment, Filipinos are required to learn Nihongo for conversations and basic directions. Filipino migrant workers allegedly spend about six months of intensive study of the Japanese language to independently navigate social spaces such as the workplace, retail shops, and the like. However, reading Nihongo is a different matter and level of study. All participants from the community have an expert level of conversational Nihongo which they use to broaden their networks for disaster aid.

CONCLUSION

Disaster aid is one of the primary reasons for fundraising among Filipinos in Japan through Filipino community organizations, their church-based networks, and associated

groups. Exploring transnational disaster aid provides a new discourse in migration studies that situates volunteerism and agency of marginalized immigrant communities in Japan like the Filipinos. While it is recognized that marginalization creates a stereotypical representation of immigrants and migrant workers in Japan as the ‘other’ in a generally homogenous Japanese society, the lens of transnational disaster aid embeds a positive dimension of active community engagement despite the intersecting systems of oppression based on race, migration status, and simply non-Japanese. Filipino women emerge as community agents in Hiroshima in facilitating the ‘social’ economics related to disaster aid to the Philippines. Transnational disaster aid from Japan to the Philippines points to the invisibility of social good in migration, where the lives of immigrants or permanent residents and migrant workers become interlinked to lend support to those impacted by disasters in the Philippines.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, J. N. 2005. “Filipinos in Japan”. In *Encyclopedia of Diaspora*, eds. M. Ember and I. Skoggard, 808-810. Boston, MA: Springer
- Becker, G.S. and K.M. Murphy. 2000. *Social Economics: Market Behavior in a Social Environment*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Ministry of Justice. 2018. Statistics of Foreign Residents Registered. *Statistics Japan*, <https://stats-japan.com/t/kiji/11628>
- Murga, A. 2022. Filipinos count cost of climate crisis as typhoons get ever more destructive. *The Guardian* January 5, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/jan/05/filipinos-count-cost-of-climate-crisis-as-typhoons-get-ever-more-destructive>.
- Osaki, T. and M. Masangkay. 2018. “Filipinos and Nepalese face challenges in Japan even as their communities grow.” *The Japan Times*, January 3. <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/01/03/national/filipinos-nepalese-face-challenges-japan-even-communities-grow/#.XL3gruhKiUk>
- Timog BBS. 2021. Filipinos in Japan: 2020 Demographics. July. <https://timog.net/t/filipinos-in-japan-2020-demographics/131>