The 1.5-Generation Filipinos in Japan: Focus on Adjustment to School System and Career Development

Sachi TAKAHATA, Ph.D.
Faculty of Contemporary Sociology
Hiroshima Kokusai Gakuin University

Abstract
Along with the increase of Filipino women marrying Japanese men since the 1990's, the number of 1.5G Filipino children of the mothers’ former marriages increased in Japan. What is specific to Japan is the difficulty of language acquisition for Filipinos. Learning a new language with totally different characters after the age of 10 makes it quite difficult for them to “assimilate” into the formal school education and gain educational attainment in the new land. This preliminary paper is based on the life histories of 1.5G Filipinos in Japan in their 20’s, focusing on their experiences of settlement and joining/giving up higher education, aiming to reveal the issues surrounding their education and career development.

Keywords: 1.5G Filipinos in Japan, education, language acquisition, career development

1. Introduction

1.1 Background
Nobody will deny that it is better for a child to live together with his/her parents. Based on that belief, Filipino women who married/remarried Japanese men let their children left behind in the Philippines stop school education there to come to Japan and join the “new” family. This “they-lived-happily-ever-after” story sometimes ends with a really happy one, where a Filipino mother lives with her grown-up “best friend” child who she can speak to in the same language, while the Japanese stepfather proudly looks over the stepchild who successfully “assimilated” into Japanese society. However, it sometimes ends with totally exhausted parents and a teenage gangster who was once a “good boy” in the Philippines but is now about to fall into juvenile delinquency. Sometimes, simply the “age” at the time of migration matters.
The term "1.5-Generation Filipinos" (hereinafter called "1.5G Filipinos") may sound new to some readers – here, it is defined as "someone who grew up and was educated in the Philippines, and migrated to Japan roughly around 10 years of age, to join his/her family and experienced junior and senior high school education in Japan." As discussed in the literature review section, 10 years old is the decisive age for a child to acquire a new language for academic understanding. If a child comes to Japan from the Philippines over 10 years old, he/she needs to confront the difficulty of acquiring Japanese, which has a totally different linguistic structure from his/her own, in the midst of their adolescence.

As the number of Filipino migrants in Japan reached more than 21,000 in 2008, more and more teenagers are coming to the "land of hope", to end the life of separation from their mothers and to find seemingly "easy" employment in Japan. In this preliminary study of the life histories of 1.5-G Filipinos the author aims to explore the issue of their survival in Japan, focusing on their adjustment to the formal school system as well as their chances for career development.

1.2 Objective of the study
The study has 3 objectives: first, to clarify the impact of the 1.5G Filipinos moving from the Philippines to Japan, a totally different linguistic environment; second, to show the patterns of educational attainment and career development for 1.5G Filipinos; and third, to explore the suggestions for the intervention of schoolteachers and supporters for their better understanding of the plight of 1.5G Filipinos. Therefore, this is a preliminary and fact-finding study using the theories of sociology of education as well as the life history data of 1.5G Filipinos.

1.3 Increasing number of 1.5 Filipinos
We assume that the number of Filipino teenagers is increasing, but there are no statistics to show the exact number of 1.5G Filipinos in Japan. This is because their visa status is either "long-term resident" where Filipino divorcees and 3rd generation Japanese descendants are also categorized. Also, some of them have Japanese nationality and are excluded from the statistics of migrants.

The "invisible" nature of 1.5G Filipinos is related to their mode of incorporation into Japanese society. The majority of them are accompanied by Filipino mothers who re/married Japanese men, so their migration to Japan is considered to be due to a "personal" network. Therefore, their existence is not officially counted and considered.

One rough way to measure the impact of 1.5G Filipinos in Japan is to consider that there were 14,427 registered Filipinos who belong to the 10-19 age bracket in 2008 – five times as many as in 1997 (only 2,866). Figure 1 shows the population pyramid of Filipinos in Japan. Comparing
the same age groups of 1997 with 2008, we can understand the population growth as well as their general aging. As of 2008, the majority of Filipino women belonged to the age bracket of 35-40: they were clearly middle aged. On the other hand, Filipino teenagers increased rapidly, which would be as a result of (1) adopting children left behind in the Philippines (referred to here as “1.5G”), (2) an increase of Filipino children born out of both Filipino migrant parents, (3) Filipino expatriates living in Japan with children.

(Figure 1: Population pyramid of Filipinos in Japan, 1997 and 2008. Source: Japan Immigration Association, Statistics of Registered Migrants in Japan)

Also, according to the statistics from the Ministry of Education, there were 3,367 in school in 2008 whose mother tongue was Filipino and were in need of special Japanese language education. This was 417 or 16.3% more than that in the previous year. As a broad picture of Japan, there were 24,250 children in public elementary and junior high schools receiving special education of Japanese language as of 2008. The majority of them speak Portuguese (11,386 or 39.8%), then Chinese (5,831 or 20.4%), and Spanish (3,634 or 12.7%). Filipino is the 4th biggest mother tongue of foreign-born children learning in compulsory education now in Japan. Out of the total of 3,367 children, 2,199 of them go to elementary school while 947 are in junior high school1.

1 Ministry of Education of Japan Website: http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/houdou/21/07 (accessed on 10 November 2010).
2. Review of literature

2.1. Language acquisition
Saito (2009) reviewed literature on the educational issues of foreign-born schoolchildren in Japan who need special education of Japanese language. Based on her interviews with school teachers in charge of such special education, there are 4 points that she specifies:
Firstly, one year is sufficient for small children to learn conversational Japanese, and around 2 years for 3-6 graders;
Secondly, even if a child understands only conversational Japanese, he/she will have difficulty understanding the academic lessons in Japanese;
Thirdly, a child who came to Japan at grade 1-2 will find it easy to learn Japanese, but when he/she reaches grade 5-6, it becomes difficult for him/her to acquire sufficient literacy to catch up with the academic lessons;
Finally, there are many children who come to Japan at grade 5-6 and find it easy to join the academic lessons by replacing the Japanese language with their mother tongue. Especially, those who are from China and Korea learn Japanese quickly.

In the case of 1.5G Filipinos, if one comes to Japan at grade 5-6 (or at the age of above 10 years old), it will be difficult for them to acquire sufficient literacy to catch up with the ordinary lessons. On the fourth point, Saito pointed out that those from China and Korea at grade 5-6 sometimes find it easy to join the academic lessons. This is because of the similarity of Japanese with their mother tongues: similarity of characters with Chinese migrants, and grammatical and phonetic similarities with Korean migrants. The 1.5G Filipinos are not so lucky in this respect, they need to acquire the language from a more basic level.

2.2. Difficulty to enter senior high school
If a 1.5G Filipino comes to Japan at the age of 10, he/she will join junior high school at the age of 12 almost automatically. This is because junior high school education is compulsory in Japan, but after 3 years, he/she needs to choose whether to go into the labor force or enter senior high school. Of course, finding formal and stable employment is difficult if one is only a junior high school graduate. But the question is: if a child has insufficient literacy in academic Japanese, will he/she be able to take the same entrance exam to senior high school as a native Japanese child?

According to Inui (2008), based on preceding studies, we can guess that the ratio of entering senior high school among new-comer foreigners is about half of that of Japanese graduates (97%). In Hyogo Prefecture, for example, only 53% of foreign graduates from junior high school proceeded to senior high school.
There are some factors which hinder new-comer foreigners proceeding to senior high school: Firstly, the school educational system has a structure which makes it difficult for them to “survive”. In other words, the structure is aimed to “select” students and those with less literacy are not prioritized.
Secondly, children find it difficult to adjust themselves to a totally new environment upon coming to Japan.
Thirdly, it is difficult for the children’s family members to find sufficient time to attend to their child’s studies at home, because foreign adults are working in very hard labor conditions.
Finally, there is no social “model” around the children and their families.

A typical scenario for foreign-born children is this: He/she will grow up in the home land but come to Japan for the first time. He/she will spend time to adjust to the new language environment, but his/her education is limited in school as the parents need to work long hours. Since there is no social model around him/her, the child/youth has no idea as to which direction he/she should go and what he/she can be in the future.

To avoid such a situation, educational intervention by school teachers and volunteers is necessary. And in fact, the seven informants of this study told us that they availed themselves of such assistance in and out of school. Let me introduce the data of their life histories.

3. Data Analysis

3.1 Seven cases of 1.5G Filipinos in Japan
We have chosen the samples of 1.5G Filipinos, who came to Japan roughly at the age of 10, having experience of junior and senior high school education, and roughly more than 20 years at the time of interview. As mentioned above, they are those who experienced difficulty of acquiring the new language but were still able to enter senior high school.

As there are no statistics to set the population, we chose the interviewees by a snowball sampling method. Interviews were done in March-August 2010. They were 1 male and 6 females living in Tokyo, Yokohama, Shizuoka and Osaka. We used a life history approach.

We used Tagalog to interview Case C, but in the other cases we talked in Japanese. Aside from Case C, there was no problem in understanding their conversational Japanese. Usually, each semi-structured, face-to-face interview took about 1 hour.

3.1.2 Outline of 7 cases
Case A (21 years old) was born in the Philippines of Filipino mother and Japanese father. She came to Japan at the age of 7 to stay here for one year, but went back to the Philippines.
At the age of 11, she migrated to Japan with her family to stay here up until recently. After graduating from junior college in Japan, she is now a university student in the Philippines. She is a Japanese national by birth.

Case B (23 years old) was adopted and came to Japan at the age of 14 when his mother remarried a Japanese man. He entered junior high school here, and then finished senior high school. Now he works as an in-house translator at a manpower agency. He is a Philippine national, but is now applying for naturalization to Japan.

Case C (28 years old) is now a part-time retail worker in Japan. She came to Japan at the age of 13. The author was actually her tutor when she was in junior high school. She entered a private senior high school, but dropped out in the 2nd year, then went back to the Philippines to enter university. She spent 9 years there, and decided to come back to Japan in 2009. She is a Philippine national but has permanent residency status in Japan.

Case D (22 years old) is now a 4th year student of university. She came to Japan at the age of 13, and is the only case that entered Japanese language school before joining elementary school. After graduating from public senior high school, she entered university majoring in international studies. When she was in the third year, she studied in the United States for one year. Her nationality is Filipino.

Case E (22 years old) came to Japan at the age of 12. She finished senior high school and is working in the marketing department of a private company. She is a Philippine national.

Case F (19 years old) is a very talkative woman. She came to Japan at the age of 10 and finished senior high school. When she was interviewed, she had just finished her vocational training to be a caregiver.

Case G (21 years old) is married to a 3rd generation Peruvian of Japanese descendant. She came to Japan at the age of 5 to spend 1 year here, but returned to the Philippines. After she finished elementary school in the Philippines, she came to Japan to stay here up to now. She is a mother of 2 children, and has acquired Japanese nationality already. She used to be a part-time clerical worker but temporarily stopped her job due to pregnancy.

3.2 Family reunion / reform in Japan

3.2.1 Outline

Both father and mother were with the child before migrating to Japan in Case A only. In other cases, the mother worked in Japan, remarried a Japanese man and accompanied Filipino children to live together in Japan. This is the usual mode of incorporation into the new family.
and new educational environment.

In the Philippines, Cases B,C,D,E,F,G lived with their grandparents, uncles/aunts, cousins and siblings, nephew/nieces, and domestic helpers. When they came to Japan, relationships with step fathers were not bad in step families (Cases B,C,D,E,F,G). One reason is because the step family invested enough in the education of the 1.5G youths, such as private tutors and language schools.

3.2.2 Sentiment to Filipino mothers before coming to Japan
Before coming to Japan, the informants lived in the Philippines separately from their mothers. Although it is not unusual in the Philippine setting where overseas employment is a usual choice for households, the children left behind had mixed feeling towards the mothers.

Case B: "When my mother was working here (while I was in the Philippines), she spent vacation there, but (due to the long separation) I think I don’t know her deeply.”

Case D: "My mother worked as an entertainer for 8 times. Many of our family members expected her to earn money, but there was one time she got sick. When she told me there was a Japanese man offering marriage to her, I agreed because I felt it was a way for our financial stability.”

Case G: "My mother often came home (from Japan) with a lot of chocolate. We were well-off I guess.”

3.2.3 Getting into the step family
Their being able to finish senior high school will be a product of how they have been loved and invested in by the step family. Financial stability of the family and the parents’ emphasis on education is essential to encourage their children to continue schooling up to graduation from senior high school.

Case B: "My stepfather loved me a lot. He is very open to me, and did not deny me when I had something I wished to do… He is really a good person. He is always smiling. When my mother scolded me, he said, “Don’t worry. Be positive, you are still young.”

Case D: "My stepfather worried about me (when I came to Japan). He told me to go to language school first before going to junior high school. So I attended Japanese language school for 8 months… He really helped me. I think due to his help I can be what I am now.”

Also, several informants told the author, “I know I am exceptional. I have seen many of my
friends in the same situation (of being 1.5G Filipino) who did not enter senior high school, or dropped out of school, and went back to the Philippines.”

3.3 Immersion in Japanese school education
3.3.1 Outline
Their experiences of adjusting to the school system are determined by how they confronted the language and cultural barrier. There are some elementary and junior high schools in specific municipalities with a concentration of foreign population which provide immersion classes to foreign-born students. These classes as well as “international plazas” where volunteer tutors can attend to them become important places for them as initial landing points. Learning can be inside and outside the school.

Cases A,E,F,G started education in Japan at an elementary level, while B,C,D started at junior high school level. All cases received special Japanese lessons in the immersion classes and/or by part-time tutors dispatched by the educational board of the municipality. For Case B, classmates at special immersion classes were their first “friends” in Japan.

There are ways to learn Japanese language outside school. Case A attended Japanese classes at a municipal international center, which became the “place” for her up to now. Her tutor at the international center acted as a mentor for her, to guide her up to the college entrance exam. On the other hand, only Case D took a special Japanese course at a language school before entering junior high school.

3.3.2 Language acquisition
There is no instant way for Filipino migrants to learn Japanese from a basic level. Aside from Case A and G, who stayed in Japan for 1 year when they were small children, migrating to Japan means to jump into a totally new language environment.

Case B: There was a special class (at junior high school) for foreign-born students... I was supposed to learn Japanese there. But, I learned Spanish first as there were many Hispanic students. They were my initial good friends. After one year in JHS, I was able to attend ordinary classes for Japanese students… In senior high school, I learned many kanji characters by exchanging text mails with Japanese friends.

Case F: I learned Japanese at school (when I was in grade 6). I did not go to juku (review class). I learned fast when I communicated with Japanese friends. I think that is the most effective way.

Case D attended a Japanese language school for 8 months before entering grade 6. For her
the formal education of language together with university-bound foreign students worked effectively. After 4 years from her arrival, when she was in the first year of senior high school, she passed the level 1 of Japanese Language Proficiency Test.

3.3.3 Learning outside the school
For Case A, the international lounge meant a lot. It became a place for her and her sister to learn Japanese and find someone to guide her to college education.

Case A: "Aside from school, I went to the municipal International Lounge where I availed myself of the volunteer tutoring in the evening of Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. I had good friends at school, but I was not able to ask too many questions to them. So, I did not depend on my classmates and instead, I tried to seek help from senior students I met at the International Lounge... I studied there right before the entrance exam to the senior high school... There were volunteer tutors to help us. They were university students."

3.3.4 Identity crisis, conflict at school
However, they sometimes faced a crisis at school. In the age of adolescence when even Japanese native children are unstable in search for their "self", the 1.5G youths sometimes feel inferior due to their "foreigner" status.

Case A: "I felt an inferiority complex of being able to talk in Tagalog. It was because I felt that for many Japanese, the image of the Philippines was "dirty", and they thought of Philippine Pubs. My mother was not working there (but people thought so), thus I was not proud of being able to talk in Tagalog, and also having a Filipino parent."

Case F: "In my first year at junior high school, many people called me, "half". Even the students of different classes called me "half" or "gaijin (foreigner)" when they pass by when going to gymnasium or music class. I felt bad."

Above narratives show how they recall the days of junior high school. Both A and F have overcame the crisis, and they say, "Now I know that because of the experience, I am able to stand strong."

3.4 Special entrance exam to SHS in Japan as "returning student"
3.4.1 Outline
It is very difficult for Filipino migrants to take the same entrance exam as Japanese native children. The special entrance exam for "returning students" or those who came to Japan less than 3 years before the entrance exam is almost the only way for 1.5G to enter senior high school and higher education in Japan. For example, Case D took the special exam to public
senior high school where they were tested by means of an essay and a personal interview. Case C entered the private senior high school through the special entrance exam as a foreign student with essay writing and personal interview too.

But such special provision is only available in limited prefectures/municipalities – Kanagawa, Shizuoka, Aichi, Tokyo, Osaka (Inui, 2008), where the cases of this study grew up. Cases A, B, D, E, F, G used the special entrance exam to public senior high school. Case C entered a private senior high school as a foreign student, after taking the special entrance exam.

3.4.1 Selecting senior high school by teachers’ advice

Usually, the 1.5G youths and their parents have limited information on how to enter senior high school in Japan with their level of Japanese literacy and academic attainment. Therefore, the class teacher plays an important role for their decision of which school to enter. Also, a tutor to teach them Japanese will be a mentor and advisor for their future. Knowledge about such special provision is a decisive factor determining whether they pursue an educational path or not.

Case B: "My class teacher and Filipino tutor advised me to go to the senior high school (with special provision). It (the school) was the only choice for me, they said. I wanted to work as a carpenter, but I passed the entrance exam and decided to go to the senior high school."

Case D: "My teacher suggested that the school (which accepts foreign-born students who stay in Japan less than 3 years) would be the only choice. Ms. A (Filipino tutor dispatched to junior high school) helped me preparing for the interview."

3.5 Future Plan

3.5.1 Outline

The informants are in their early 20’s and are still in search for their "future". Case A graduated from a junior college majoring in English, and is now a university student in the Philippines. After studying in Japan, she “returned” to her land of origin.

Others have decided to naturalize in Japan. Case B personally applied for naturalization, separate from his Filipino mother. Also, Case G naturalized to Japanese nationality when she gave birth to her first daughter. She prepared the necessary documents by herself.

On the other hand, Case C and D are thinking of migrating to the United States. Case C experienced living in the Philippines after she quit senior high school when she was in the 2nd year. As she has relatives there, re-migrating to the United States is an option while maintaining her permanent resident status in Japan. Also, Case D plans to go to the United
States after graduating from university in Japan. She studied there for one year and her future plan of migrating to the United States is quite a probable plan.

They are still young and some are on their way to a transnational way of life. Settling down in Japan is not the only state of “successful” adjustment, and they are free to go to anywhere. However, their willingness to migrate to the United States and other countries could be taken as evidence of how limited they see their future in Japan. There is no case yet found of a Filipino migrant graduating from university in Japan and finding full-time employment, a future project will be to following-up their career paths.

3.5.2 Citizenship and where to live
They have various ethnic identities. Some call them “Filipino” and others will identify themselves as “Japanese”. Their decision to acquire Japanese nationality is still on the way. Their ethnic identity is still flexible.

Case G: “When I gave birth to my first daughter, I naturalized to a Japanese. I am a Japanese citizen now. When people ask me who I am, I will reply, “I am a Japanese”.

Case B: “I have already applied for naturalization to Japan. I finished interview recently.”

Case E: “I think I am a Japanized Filipino.”

Case D: “I got permanent visa of Japan, but I have not yet decided to become a Japanese citizen. I cannot totally “abandon” being a Filipino.”

3.5.3 Career development / future plan
Some of the informants told us that they wish to work in a field where their “being 1.5G Filipino” is evaluated positively. In other words, working as an in-between of the two cultures.

Case G: “I married very young, so when I reach 40, I will seek for my dream. I will set up a business in Japan, the Filipino brand of fast food, Jolibee.”

Case F: “I wanted to be a “wedding planner”, but due to some financial problems, I decided to take a vocational course as a caregiver. I think I will save money to pursue my dream in the future.”

Case D: “I am not sure if it can be a “job”, but I wish to be a bridge between Japan and the Philippines. I wish to assist Filipino migrants here, and also Filipino nurses and caregivers.”
4. Conclusion
Based on the data above, the author will end the paper with the following findings which correspond with the objectives of this study.

Firstly, there was a large impact on 1.5G Filipinos in moving from the Philippines to Japan. This is due to the fact that none of them learned Japanese before coming to Japan. They needed to jump into the world of Japanese-speaking children as soon as they arrived in Japan. It entailed their feeling of isolation at school, but the immersion class as well as the language tutors played important roles in providing them with initial landing points in school. Only Case D entered the Japanese language school for 8 months before entering grade 6, which made it easy for her to catch up with the study at elementary school and succeed at junior high school.

Secondly, the patterns of educational attainment will be through the special entrance exam for "returning students" or those who arrived in Japan less than 3 years before the entrance exam. In many cases, the informants chose the specific schools "friendly to foreign-born students" upon the teachers’ advice. Due to their limited literacy, the senior high school "which will accept them" is usually limited, therefore the direction is naturally provided already. Among the 7 cases, Case A and D proceeded to junior college and university in Japan while others started to work after graduation from senior high school. The question still remains as to how their educational attainment in Japan will be effectively utilized in their future, which will be tackled in forthcoming research.

Thirdly, the suggestions for the intervention of schoolteachers and concerned citizens will be: (1) continuation of personal tutoring and volunteers in and out of school, playing an important role in their future planning; (2) guidance for senior high school education in the prefectures with low concentrations of foreigners where such information and multilingual services are not available.

In fact, special provisions for the entrance exam to senior high school are their survival kit in the educational system of Japan. However, they are available in only limited prefectures as mentioned above. They will be available in more prefectures in the near future. We may assume that the cases shown here are the "lucky" ones as they were successful in adjusting to school and acquiring the language, thus were able to graduate from senior high school. Many informants said that they were aware of being "exceptional".

How shall we interpret the word "exceptional"? For many 1.5G Filipinos, participation into the labor force would be usual and helpful for the family financial rescue, or there may be other factors to prevent them from proceeding to senior high school. Further research needs to be done on drop-outs and those doing vocational work, to dig into the depth of the realities surrounding them.
References


Note

This is a revised version of the paper presented at the Philippine Studies Conference in Japan (PSCJ) held at Tsukuba International Convention Center in Tsukuba, Japan, on 14 November 2010. Funding for this study comes from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research Category B-Overseas, for the project entitled "Imin Dai-1.5-sedai no kodomo-tachi no tekiou katei ni kansuru kokusai hikaku kenkyu – Filipin-kei imin no jirei (comparative study on the adjustment process of the 1.5—generation migrant children – cases of Filipino migrants)”, led by Dr. Itaru Nagasaka of Hiroshima University. I sincerely thank the 7 informants for their sharing, the scholars who gave me comments at PSCJ, and Mr. George Higginbotham, English teacher of Hiroshima Kokusai Gakuin University, who is always helpful and patient to proofread my English texts.
在日フィリピン人1.5世代
～学校教育への適応とキャリア形成の課題を中心に

高畑 幸

1990年代から日本人男性とフィリピン人女性との結婚が増加し、同時にフィリピン人母の再婚に伴い来日の子どもたち（在日フィリピン人1.5世代）もまた増えている。アメリカ等への移住とは異なり、子どもたちにとって日本への移住は学習言語が異なる世界への参入ともなる。渡日時の年齢が10歳を超える場合は特に、学習言語としての日本語の獲得や公教育への適応と「同化」、学力の積み重ねが困難となる。本研究は、10歳を超えて渡日し、現在20代となった在日フィリピン人1.5世代の生活史調査から得られた初期段階の知見をまとめたものである。日本の学校への適応、高等教育への参加／不参加に焦点を当て、彼らが日本でなしにる教育的・職業的達成をめぐる諸問題を明らかにしたい。

キーワード：在日フィリピン人1.5世代、教育、言語習得、職業的達成