

Migration of South Koreans to the Philippines: Its History, Challenges and Impact

Song, Eulsub

Ph. D Student

Xiamen University, Research School For Southeast Asian Studies

Abstract: The wave of Korean migration to the Philippines brought significant contributions for both countries. For Korean people, they enjoyed the hospitality of the Filipinos who accommodated them in several ways like in business ties, education, tourism, and cultural aspect. On the other hand, Filipinos experienced better economic conditions brought about by trade and local business by Koreans. The friendly and hospitable environment brought more Koreans to the Philippines who took pleasure on cheaper travels and English learning. The various establishments of Korean associations in the Philippines allowed Korean people to work, study, and stay in the country in a comfortable way. The bilateral relation between the two countries remained strong and is enriched by various activities which strengthened friendship and camaraderie.

Keywords: migration, social bilateral relations, economy, education, and tourism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Strong bilateral social relations between nations bring effective and positive interactions which can possibly result to economic growth and interdependence. The idea of sharing opportunities to nurture relations beyond diplomatic way into a deeper interpersonal and intercultural knowledge of both parties develop a network of unique social structure that paves way for relocation and eventually migration. Migration is an opportunity of exploring the country's culture, ideals, and principles which can be assimilated in daily living to maintain harmony and peace.

Migration is defined as a change of residence and journey to work or types of boundaries crossed. It is an important network for the diffusion of ideas and information and indicates symptoms of social and economic change and can be regarded as a human adjustment to economic, environmental, and social problems.¹ In addition, it is an instrument of cultural diffusion and social integration which may create communities within the community. It is a spatial interaction among human population.²

Migration can be traced way back primitive era which may be brought about by survival nature and ecological force. When food sources are already scarce in one place, the human tendency is to seek other places with more food sources. Also, when people are unable to cope with environmental conditions, they are inclined to leave and find a more adaptable environment for survival. However, in the contemporary society it involves very complicated and multidimensional criteria which include internal and international migration. Internal migration is associated with crossing within the nation or country from one district or state to another. International migration, on the other hand, is crossing political boundaries from one country to another or from one continent to another. Migrants who crossed international boundary are called immigrants and they are subject to policies and laws governed by the nation they chose to settle. Moreover, migration can be a permanent or non-permanent settlement depending on the person's choice of stay and purpose. Hence, migration involves people of different age, gender, social class, religion, education, and marital status³.

¹ Demko, G.J., Ross, H.M., & Schnell, G.A. (1970). Population geography: A reader. McGraw Hill Book and Company, New York.

² Shrivastava, O.S. (1983). A textbook of geography. Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi.

³ Sinha, B.R.K. (2005). Human migration: Concepts and approaches. Retrieved from http://www.mtafki.hu/konyvtar/kiadv/FE2005/FE20053-4_403-414.pdf

2. FACTORS PROMPTING SOUTH KOREAN MIGRATION

Korean migration is mainly driven by political and economic factors. These two were the drivers of Korean migration to different places of the earth. It started around mid-19th century to 1910 when farmers and laborers emigrated to China, Russia and Hawaii to escape famine, poverty and the oppression by the ruling class. The second period is from 1910 to 1945, a Japan-bound migration of Korean farmers and laborers who were deprived of land and jobs and who moved to Japan to fill labor shortages created by Japan's wartime conditions. The third period covers the years from 1945 to 1962 when many Koreans being wives of US military servicemen, students, war orphans who were adopted, and children of mixed parentage moved to the United States. The fourth period is from 1962 onwards when Koreans began to leave as contract workers to Latin America, Western Europe, the Middle East and North America in response to the emigration policy adopted by South Korea in 1962 which encouraged Koreans to work and live overseas to secure foreign exchange through dollar remittances. Further, the liberalization of US immigration policy in 1965 further drew large numbers of Korean immigrants to the US in search of better economic and educational opportunities. By 2001, around 5.6 million South Koreans were in 151 countries around the world and their numbers are rising each year until the present.⁴

3. THE WAVE OF KOREAN MIGRATION TO THE PHILIPPINES

Nowadays, Korea has become one of the most influential countries in Asia and becoming more visible in the global society. In fact, it is not only their influence on cultural products like movies and soap-operas, food, and music which thoroughly spread out all over Asia and worldwide but also their presence in various Asian countries, especially in the Philippines. The Philippines ranks 10th among countries hosting South Koreans, the largest number in Southeast Asia.⁵ Hence, it is very hard not to notice them everywhere in the Philippine archipelago.

The South Korean migration to the Philippines presents peculiarity since this break the common pattern of migration which is moving from less developed nations to more developed ones. In contrast, South Korean migration to the Philippines is driven by economic modernization and prosperity. The appreciation of Korean *won* and increase cost of Korean labor lead to the transfer of Korean companies and its production facilities in the Philippines. The expansion of Korean companies in the Philippines and the intensified economic cooperation between the two countries triggered today's wave of Korean migration.⁶ Since then, the growth of Korean visits and migration to the Philippines brought about by Korean company personnel and businessmen, students, tourists, and missionaries became enormous and created a phenomenon called the Korean wave.

In historical context, the bilateral relations between South Korea and the Philippines started on March 3, 1949 when the Philippines became the fifth country to recognize the Republic of Korea which was inaugurated on August 15, 1948. The friendship was established when the Philippines sent help to South Korea to defend itself from the invasion of the North. The deployment of five battalion combat teams of the Philippine Expeditionary Force to Korea (PEFTOK) during the Korean War in the 1950s concentered strong ties between the two countries. Since then, the relations between the Philippines and South Korea have always been characterized by such mutual trust and support.

The influx of South Korean migrants to the Philippines started after World War 2 when war brides of Filipino soldiers (PEFTOK) who fought against North Korea in favor of UN Forces in the Korean War moved with their husbands in the country and later on formed the Mothers' Association by 1975. By 1980's a rapid economic growth and modernization was experienced by South Korea which propelled the next phase of Korean migration to the Philippines. However, this time the diaspora was due to significant economic prosperity in contrast to the previous migration which was due to formidable condition of colonization of stronger neighboring country and economic crisis. This period was devoted to the building of physical and human capital infrastructures that served as the basis for subsequent industrial development. Korea's attainment of economic modernization from being an agrarian society to an industrialized one generated big and small industries which extended ties of economic cooperation with other countries.⁷

⁴ Yoon I.J. (2005). Korean Diaspora. In: Ember M., Ember C.R., Skogard I. (eds) Encyclopedia of Diasporas. Springer, Boston, MA

⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Emigration Division 2001. Statistics of Overseas Koreans (in Korean).

⁶ Kutsumi, K. (2004). Koreans in the Philippines: A study of the formation of their social organization. Paper delivered at the PMRN Regional Conference on Transnational Communities in the Philippines

⁷ Kim, K.S. (1991). The Korean miracle (1962-1980) revisited: Myths and realities in strategy and development. The Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies. Retrieved from https://kellogg.nd.edu/sites/default/files/old_files/documents/166_0.pdf

The economic modernization hits its momentum by 1990's and South Korea gained membership to the select Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and presently classified as a high income industrialized country by international financial institutions. In a matter of only two decades the country attained an industrialized status – the shortest time in history. This brought intensified bilateral relations and economic connection with the Philippines. Hence, the number of Korean investment projects in the Philippines grew with a corresponding dramatic rise in the value of investment. The succeeding years from 2001 to 2010 proved a competitive increase in GDP which more than doubled over the last 10 years from 504. 6 billion to 1,014.4 billion dollars according to Statistics Korea.⁸

The gigantic rise of Korean economy was basically caused by export-expansion strategy which fits fairly to the demands of the world market during the era. The Korean government well understood that they should emphasize the significance on these basic materials such as iron and steel, petrochemicals, nonferrous metals, and refined oil for they are the backbone of a modern industrial economy. Thus, manufacturing, mining, construction and ship-building, machine and equipment industry, which gave birth to automotive and electronics industry, are sectors being developed by the government to stay competitive in the world market maintaining the economic progress of the nation.

Consequently, manufacturing companies and electronics industries expanded their sites in the Philippines because of labor issues. The appreciation of Korean won and inflation of economic condition in South Korea demanded higher wages to Korean workers so entrepreneurs and proprietors decided to transfer most of their facilities and equipment in the Philippines to lessen labor expenses due to lesser wages and benefits demand by the latter. So the flow of Korean businessmen and personnel continues until the present.

The entry of Korean companies and businesses in the Philippines secured and strengthened the economic relations of the two countries until the present day thus prompted the inflow of Korean migration to the country. A survey of Kutsumi showed that a large number of Koreans with their families are concentrated along Parañaque and Las Piñas in Metro Manila and Cavite consisting of those working in several companies and in Export Processing Zone Area (EPZA). Additionally, the president of the Korean Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines Jae J. Jang exhorted that the Philippines' location and manpower makes it one of the best destinations for Korean businesses. Around 250 large factories in special economic zones in the Philippines are Korean-owned. Koreans are also among the top investors in the tourism industry. There are now over 100,000 Koreans residing, each of whom are estimated to spend an average of \$800-\$1000 per month, which adds up to almost \$1 billion in consumer spending each year.⁹

At present, Koreans are everywhere in the Philippines, from up north in the cool city of Baguio to Davao City down south in Mindanao. According to Asian Journal USA, Koreans have invaded the Philippines, and Filipinos for the most part are welcoming them with open arms. In 2006, Koreans took the number one spot both in tourist arrivals and foreign investment in the Philippines. More than 570,000 Koreans visited the country, overtaking arrivals from the US, which includes returning overseas Filipino residents and workers. On the resort island of Boracay alone, arguably the most famous tourist spot in the country, 65 percent of the visitors who enjoyed the powdery white sand were Koreans. Accounting for \$1.2 billion of the \$3.5 billion in investments that entered the Philippines in 2006, is now also the nation's biggest source of foreign direct investment, followed by the US and Japan. A large bulk of this figure is courtesy of Hanjin Heavy Industries and Construction Co., which is building a \$1 billion shipyard - the fourth largest in the world inside the Subic Bay Freeport Zone in Zambales Province north of Manila.

The arrival of several families working, studying, and travelling in the Philippines demands for numerous Korean businesses which suddenly sprouted like mushrooms. Thus the inflow of Korean migrants continues steadily with the emergence of several Korean restaurants, supermarkets, resorts, beaches and diving centers, spas and massage centers, KTV's, hair salon and beauty shops, and travel and tour companies. The Korean markets and restaurants became popular also among local Filipinos. With the wave of K-Pop music, Korean soap-operas, and dramas, Filipinos are becoming

⁸ Miralao, V.A. (2007). "Understanding the Korean Diaspora to the Philippines", in Miralao, V.A.; Makil, L.P., Exploring Transnational Communities in the Philippines, Philippine Social Science Council, pp. 24–39, ISBN 971-8514-26-0

⁹ Kutsumi, K. (2002). A Study of South Korean Investment in the Philippines. International Society for Korean Studies, International Journal of Korean Studies 8:157–172.

more and more interested in Korean culture, food, and lifestyle.¹⁰ This created a unique socio-cultural structure between Koreans and Filipinos.

Not long after, the Philippines embarked on a targeted marketing campaign backed by a \$3.2 million annual budget to attract Korean tourists. Part of this campaign is a Korean language tourism website and a series of advertising materials, including a 30 second television commercial, showing Korean actress Eugene Kim enjoying the beauty of the Philippines. In 2003, the Tourism Department launched its English as a Second Language Tour Program, which combines language activities with vacation trips. While also targeting Chinese and Japanese students, Koreans make up the bulk of its customers. They came for the main purpose of learning the English language, which they regard as a language of success. They recognize that many successful Koreans are English literates and that proficiency in the English language will land them in jobs, if not in their own country, in any English speaking country.¹¹ Riding this trend, more Koreans are encouraged to travel and study in the Philippines. The Philippine-based language schools are among the most sought for websites in learning English.

Today, hundreds of English language centers which some cater exclusively to Koreans can be found throughout the Philippines. In Cebu, the second largest city in the country, about 60 of these centers serve Korean students. Investing on the country's reputation as the only English-speaking nation in Asian region, the English academies which are widely known as *hagwons* back in Korea, where students tried to learn English bit by bit, are providing stiff competition to similar private academies in Australia and Canada.¹² Thousands of Korean students flock to the Philippines during the vacation months of January to February and July to August to take crash courses in conversational or business English. They take this opportunity to travel and study at the same time since wage factors way back home are greatly affected by their achievement in TOEIC/TOEFL Test. Most of them are attracted to the affordable tuition and even cheaper cost of living, so, many opted to stay for 6 months to 1 year.

With this, middle-income Korean population had been given opportunities to study and travel in the Philippines. They enjoyed the same privilege of studying and travelling overseas as much as the high-income Koreans who did the same in America, Canada, Australia, and even in Europe. Good reputation of Philippine Universities had made its way to South Koreans' knowledge during Marcos regime when the Philippines ranked second as an economic tiger in Asia next to Japan. They felt that these universities are competitive enough and the quality of education cannot be underrated with the big universities back home. This resulted to another wave of South Korean migration who took the opportunity of enrolling in various big Philippine universities like University of the Philippines, De La Salle University, Ateneo University, and many more. They finish degrees in college or university and even graduate studies in cheaper and lesser expense. Hence, they enjoy travelling and basking on white sand beaches at the same time studying and finishing a degree.

The situation fare so well since enjoying these luxuries in the Philippines can never be done in a costly atmosphere of Korea and other English-speaking nations. Upon returning to their homeland, they highly recommend their schools to their family members, friends, schoolmates, and colleagues which prompted the latter to study in the Philippines. So, many Koreans consider the Philippines as a good place to learn English and to pursue a university education.

Besides, the influx of Korean cultural products like soap-opera and K-Pop songs inspires Filipino women to marry Korean men. Also, the serious shortage of marriageable women in the countryside prompt Korean men to marry Filipino women. The intermarriage between the two nationalities brought Koreans to the Philippines and vice versa. An analysis of the recent profile of Filipino women married to Korean men is enlightening. Most Filipino women married to Korean men at a very young age where ages from 20 to 24 is the highest (7,928) followed by ages 25 to 30 (2,106).¹³ Despite several cultural differences, some marriages worked out smoothly.

¹⁰ Joo, J. (2011). Transnationalization of Korean Popular Culture and the Rise of Pop Nationalism in Korea. *Journal of Popular Culture*, 44: 3, pp. 489-504.

¹¹ Statistics, Economic Analysis and Information Management Division (SEAIMD) Office of Tourism Development, Planning, Research and Information Management (OTDPRIM), Department of Tourism. Retrieved from <http://www.tourism.gov.ph/pages/industryperformance.aspx>

¹² Ibid. 11

¹³ De Dios, A.J. (2016). Filipino Korean Marriages: Issues and Challenges in Multiculturalism. Retrieved from:

Lastly, Korea remains the country's top source of arrivals and has accumulated 686,630 arrivals for 2017 as published by Statistics, Economic Analysis and Information Management Division (SEAIMD) of the Department of Tourism, Philippines. This number is compared to the United States of America which occupied the second spot with an aggregate of 428,767 visitors. China followed with 388,896 arrivals and visitors from Japan formed 255,819 arrivals.¹⁴ The continuous growth in number of South Koreans in the Philippines offers a deeper ties between the two nations. They continue to stand side-by-side, proud of their shared history, committed to regional peace, and united by a common future of sustainable progress and stability.

4. KOREAN ASSOCIATIONS IN THE PHILIPPINES

Korean immigrants in the Philippines desire to stay together so various Korean communities and associations are established. For Korean residents or businessmen, organizations like United Korean Community Association, The Korean Chamber of Commerce and Industry, The Korean Business Association, Overseas Korean Traders Association in the Philippines, The Korean School, and Korean Women's Association are established. These organizations cater to the growing population of Korean business in the Philippines. The chance to attend meetings and forums which serve as the venue to meet business leaders and other personalities from different industries and discuss timely issues are addressed in these organizations¹⁵. Furthermore, friendship organizations flourish to maintain the strong tie between the two countries. Such organizations include: The Filipino-Korean Association Inc., The Philippine-Korea Economic Council which serves in conducting forum for businessmen of the two countries to consult with each other, and The Philippine Expeditionary Forces to Korea (PEFTOK) to commemorate the sacrifices of Filipino soldiers for the Korean people.¹⁶

5. IMPLICATIONS OF KOREAN MIGRATION TO THE PHILIPPINES

The inflow of South Korean migration to the Philippines brought significant contributions to the host country. One of which is economic growth and development which provided Filipinos employment opportunities both in big and small industries. The economic prosperity experienced by South Koreans marks additional income to tourism and educational institutions. Also, several associations founded by South Koreans offer voluntary services for Filipinos such as educational scholarship (Manila Seoul Weekly, 16 April 2004), construction of sanitarium for lepers and Korea-Philippines Friendship Hospital, street children institutions and charity works, medical missions, and mutual cultural exchange. These contributions to the Philippine nation resulted to the building of a more profound understanding and strong relation.

However, in contrast to the norms that immigrants embrace the culture and lifestyle of the host country, Koreans in the Philippines and perhaps globally, prefer to bring Korea with them. Wherever they settle, Korean establishments soon rise. Mini-Korean communities are now scattered all over the country. There are even Korean-only suburbs in Cavite and Manila. It points that despite maintaining strong bilateral relations with the host country, they also maintain their original culture or heritage making their acculturation limited to the integration mode¹⁷ (Barros, 2006). They still prefer to use their own language, eat their own food, and hang out among themselves. They maintained their self-identity, values, beliefs, and way of thinking. Thus, Korean people became more exclusive among themselves and more reserve compared to a friendlier, hospitable, and open-minded Filipinos who developed better foreign contacts and friendships¹⁸.

Nevertheless, this deviation of Korean and Filipino characteristics never impede to create harmonious interpersonal relationship and economic cooperation activities between the two nations. The common experiences shared by these countries like being colonized, undergone economic crisis, and deep commitment to democracy created deeper appreciation of each other. These served as a bond between the two nationalities that chose to maintain a strong state relations and economic cooperation.

<https://journals.ateneo.edu/ojs/index.php/aiks/article/download/KS2015.01106/2243>

¹⁴ Ibid. 11

¹⁵ http://www.kccp.ph/xe/The_chamber

¹⁶ http://overseas.mofa.go.kr/ph-en/brd/m_3284/view.do?seq=610848&srchFr=&srchTo=&srchWord=&srchTp=&multi_itm_seq=0&itm_seq_1=0&itm_seq_2=0&company_cd=&company_nm=&page=15

¹⁷ Barros, M.EM.P. (2006). The Koreanization of Baguio: Issue of acculturation, Asia Culture Forum, pp. 1-10.

¹⁸ Kutsumi, K. (2004). Koreans in the Philippines: A study of the formation of their social organization. Paper delivered at the PMRN Regional Conference Transnational Communities in the Philippines

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