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# Filipina Migrants and the Embodiment of Successful Aging in Japan: Individual Quests for Wealth, Health, and Meaningful Interdependence

Michelle G. Ong\* and Mario Ivan López\*\*

In recent years, Japan's long-term foreign residents have continued to increase; and among the communities that have settled, Filipinos constitute one of several aging groups of migrants. This paper focuses on how aging Filipina migrants reflect upon and negotiate their observations on how they age in Japan. It argues that their perceptions of aging arise from expectations of self-reliance and independence linked to a discourse of successful aging popular in current discussions on aging globally. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, this paper shows how informants articulate their expectations through the management of finances, personal health, and the practice of transnational retirement. It ultimately shows that within a shifting neoliberal discourse that pressures citizens to age proactively, alleviating the burden on the Japanese state, Filipinas express counter-narratives through their personal worries, desires, and practices. These have implications for the discussion on aging migrants in Japan.

**Keywords:** Japan, Philippines, migrant, active aging, successful aging, care work, aging

## Introduction

Southeast Asia is characterized by dramatic socioeconomic, political, and demographic differences and change (Peng 2017). It includes countries that are among the wealthiest in Asia, as well as some of the poorest. Over the last twenty years, the speed at which aging has taken place around the globe is without precedent. Like other regions, Southeast Asia is entering into a period of shifting demographics. Various nations are aging at different rates, facing differing population growth rates, unemployment rates, and welfare

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needs of newly aging populations. Additionally, some countries have developed and promoted themselves as desirable retirement destinations for aging migrants from wealthier countries within Southeast Asia and East Asia (Toyota and Xiang 2012) while they grapple with how to provide care for their own populace. In the last decade, more and more efforts have been made by the Japanese state and international agencies to view aging from a regional standpoint and foster dialogue and cooperation among economically, culturally, demographically diverse Southeast Asian countries and Japan, South Korea, and China.<sup>1)</sup> Increasingly, the needs of migrant-receiving and migrant-sending countries have come to inform policies, programs, and pathways that redefine the care that migrant laborers provide and the conditions they eventually come to experience themselves (Chung 2010; Peng 2018). In this paper we bring attention to aging as a globally growing area of concern that has an impact on migration within, from, and into Southeast Asia as a migrant-sending and migrant-receiving region.

Migration and aging are both phenomena that are understood in the wider migration literature as being shaped by three factors. The first is a global shift toward a neoliberal ethics—the idea that human well-being is best served by allowing individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an environment characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade (Harvey 2005). The second factor is sexism against women, in which women’s bodies are seen as objects of male desire (Bartky 1990) and most suited for less valuable reproductive work (Parreñas 2008). The third factor shaping migration and aging is ageism: discrimination against old people based on negative stereotypes (Butler 1969). These evolving sociopolitical forces produce material and discursive conditions that can disadvantage migrants, women, and older people. This paper focuses on the experiences of long-term Filipina migrants who have settled in Japan, to illustrate how these forces have shaped individual realities and subjectivities: the migrants’ desires, options, and decisions around aging. Although Japan is often regarded as a “recent” country of immigration in the wider literature and one typically held up as a model of exclusionary policies (Chung 2010; Liu-Farrer 2020), this paper provides important insights into migrants’ experiences of aging in a hyper-aging population where migrant labor is increasingly seen as crucial to the economy and the provisioning

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1) For instance, see the annual ASEAN-Japan Active Aging Conference, the third and last of which was held in Manila in 2017, and the annual ASEAN and Japan High Level Officials Meeting on Caring Societies, organized by Japan’s Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, which had “Active Aging” and “Resilient Communities for Active Aging” as themes for their 2012 and 2013 conference, respectively. These meetings include representatives from ASEAN member countries and observers from South Korea and China and are supported by international organizations such as the World Health Organization and the International Labour Organization (Japan, International Affairs Division, MHLW 2013; 2014; Asian Development Bank 2017).

of care-related services.

Over the last twenty years, Japan's burgeoning aging population, shrinking labor force, increasing cost of welfare, and need for care workers have led to a push to increase immigration to the country (Milly 2020). The last two decades have witnessed various attempts at recruiting migrant labor through trainee visas, skilled migrant visas, a points system for highly skilled professionals, Nikkeijin work schemes, and a care work visa system (Ohno 2012). Most recently, the Japanese Diet partially amended the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act (ICA) to accept two new types of resident status to include semi-skilled workers across 14 sectors.<sup>2)</sup> The expectation is that young migrants will boost the economy through their labor, investments, and consumption. Japan has projected a fairly homogenous image of an ethno-nationalist country exceedingly cautious about the benefits of migration (Douglass 2000; Douglass and Roberts 2000; Liu-Farrer 2020). Yet now there is also growing acknowledgement in academic, political, and public discourse of the promises and potentials of migration and the actual contributions of migrant communities that are now settled in the country (Coulmas 2007; Satake 2011). In response to this, within Japanese ministries there are diverse discourses around foreigners: foreigners are depicted as potential threats to security (by the Ministry of Justice); as resources for economic growth (by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry); and as human beings with rights (by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare [MHLW]) (Chiba and Yamamoto 2015). This multiplicity of discourses around migrants is found in Southeast Asia as well, where attitudes toward labor migrants have been found to be generally negative even when they are recognized to be necessary in certain sectors (Tunon and Baruah 2012).

Running parallel to the introduction of immigrant labor is the encouragement of elderly individuals' continued participation in the workforce; in pension, savings, and insurance programs; and in health programs that aim to extend the number of years of independent living that aging individuals may enjoy. Aging individuals themselves are called on to offset the threat of a "silver tsunami" that could potentially place an unprecedented burden on the Japanese health-care system (Asahi Shimbun Semaru 2025 Shokku Shuzaihan 2017).

These strategies that advocate for labor migration and cultivating self-reliance among the elderly are local articulations of a global campaign for positive, active, or successful aging as a response to rapidly aging populations in industrialized countries. The discourses that arise from these revolve around "new and improved" ways of aging,

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2) The new scheme was estimated to invite over 345,000 workers (prior to the 2019–20 Coronavirus pandemic).

emphasizing a neoliberal ethic (Alexy 2011). Public policy is seen to intertwine with people's notions of individual responsibility, self-reliance, and less dependence on social structures (Alexy 2011, 898) as a response to diminishing state support for social services. This encourages citizens to be independent and responsible for their own aging (Laliberte 2006; Fine and Keeling 2010).

Within this evolving framework, foreign residents have come to claim residency, settle, have families, and age in Japan. Although a constant stream of foreign residents have settled across Japan since the 1970s, research has only recently started to highlight the need for cultural sensitivity in dealing with aging foreign residents (Kim 2010; Cho 2012). Within the main resident groups, Filipino migrants comprise the fourth-largest and most widely spread migrant group in Japan. Many of them are (or were) married to Japanese men and are now in their late forties and fifties. It is within this context of a fluid and precariously shifting view of migrants and aging individuals that this paper interrogates how older Filipina migrants make sense of their own experience of growing older in Japan.

This paper, which aims to situate Filipina migrants' experiences within a broader discussion of what it means to age as a migrant outside of one's home country, is structured as follows. First, it discusses the broader framework of shifting discourses on how migrants and aging citizens themselves may contribute to alleviating the problems of a hyper-aging population. Second, it situates Filipina migrants to Japan within this framework and shows how it results in certain practices or strategies related to caring for oneself while aging. Finally, it argues that such practices and strategies expose a neoliberal ethic toward aging while also presenting unique forms of self-responsibility, independence, and subject-making that result from Filipina migrants' struggle to navigate contrasting ideals and desires around their own aging.

## **Successful Aging in Advanced Industrialized Societies**

In 1966 the gynecologist Robert Wilson published the book *Feminine Forever*, in which he described menopause as a curable and preventable disease. It marked the beginning of a significant change in how aging was viewed in Western industrialized countries. Whereas aging was previously thought to be a time of decline, social withdrawal, and dependency, from this point on it came to be portrayed as an extension of a "middle age" characterized by opportunity, independence, and the possibility of continued productivity and fulfillment (Laliberte 2006). Three decades later, the popular book *Successful Aging* (Rowe and Kahn 1998) identified disease avoidance, maintenance of cognitive and phys-

ical functions, and sustained engagement with life as the three components of successful aging. Both these books were published for and positively received by a wide audience, given attention by the media and professionals, and have since continued to influence public opinion and academic research agendas (Holstein and Minkler 2003; Houck 2003). Themes relating to freedom, liberation, and self-fulfillment within the context of aging came to define new norms on how to age. Especially salient is John Rowe and Robert Kahn's claim that successful aging "can be attained through individual choice and effort" (1998, 37). This claim resonates in conceptualizations of positive aging (Davey and Glasgow 2006; Laliberte 2006), the modern retiree (Laliberte 2006), agelessness (Andrews 1999), and the "new midlife" (Hepworth and Featherstone 1982).

However, according to critics, there is a link between the construction of this new discourse of aging and neoliberalism (Laliberte 2006; Fine and Keeling 2010). Several studies have noted the strong emphasis on individual responsibility, consumerism, and "active" or "positive" lifestyles and a neoliberal agenda of decreasing expenditure on social services through privatization. As neoliberal political rationality has grown, "technologies aimed at promoting practices of the self that involve self-reflection and improvement, body monitoring and improvement, risk management, and lifestyle maximization have evolved" (Laliberte 2006, 186). These technologies are employed to construct personal aims aligned with neoliberal political aims, encouraging aging individuals to have desires and make decisions congruent with the reduction of state support in old age. This encouragement is apparent in the global shift toward a greater emphasis on healthy or active aging, social participation, and family responsibility for informal care (Fine and Keeling 2010).

Some posit that the promotion of this new aging reflects the dominance in Western countries of the values of independence, youthfulness, and productivity (Cruikshank 2003). Others (see Thang 2010) have observed that even Asian countries, including Japan (see Japan, International Affairs Division, MHLW 2014), are moving toward an "active aging" discourse, changing traditional views on filial piety, intergenerational support, and what constitutes desirable living arrangements. In ASEAN and Japan there have been high-level meetings on caring societies and dialogues focusing on community resilience for "active aging." These meetings have emphasized maintaining good health, engaging in social participation, and social security as goals for active aging. Individuals are envisioned as living in their communities (either independently or with their families), engaged in productive work (whether paid or voluntary), and having a wide range of options for care services (Japan, International Affairs Division, MHLW 2014). More specifically, in the Philippines the Plan of Action for Senior Citizens has specified a mission that promotes active aging, with self-sufficiency, self-reliance, and financial inde-

pendence among its goals. Notably, Republic Act No. 7432, “An Act to Maximize the Contribution of Senior Citizens to Nation Building, Grant Benefits and Special Privileges and for Other Purposes,” clarifies that elderly individuals are citizens who have both obligations and privileges in Philippine society (Republic Act 7432 1992).

### **Finding Solutions to the Problem of an Aging Population in Japan**

Industrialized nations have been undergoing an unprecedented demographic shift toward aging populations, and public discussions about the role of the aged have increased concerns that welfare states will soon find it difficult to support their aging populations. Japan, alongside Finland and Germany, is at the crest of a wave of industrialized nations that have aged most rapidly. Concurrently, in the case of Japan, this has occurred with a drop in the labor workforce. Research has shown that older adults are actively participating in community activities and are coming to be seen as able to help satisfy the labor shortage<sup>3)</sup> caused by the “demographic time bomb” of an aging society (Lai 2007, 113). The qualifying age for pensions increased in the 1990s (rising from 60 to 65 in 1995), and the age of retirement was revised to seventy as of April 1, 2020. These suggest that older people are now considered alternative, potential workers rationalized as “not fully utilized human resources” (Kato 2020). Additionally, the market is taking advantage of the burgeoning demographic of elderly, affluent boomers by tapping into the “silver market” and encouraging continued (if not greater) consumption into old age (Coulmas 2007).

To address the increasing cost of care, in 2000 Japan instituted Long-Term Care Insurance (LTCI), which reduced spending on the elderly through the integration of medical and nursing care and welfare services (Coulmas 2007). The LTCI created a private, contractual relationship between the various service providers and insured clients (Coulmas 2007; Onuki 2009). Consistent with neoliberal economic policies that have characterized Japan since the Koizumi administration, this program created a market-oriented relationship where clients have a choice over the cost, type, and quality of services they can avail of, and service providers strive to provide the best service with the most profitable margins possible (Coulmas 2007; Lai 2007; Onuki 2009). More important, a review of the program in 2005 led to changes that, for the purposes of ensuring financial viability (i.e., reducing the cost to the government), placed more

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3) That said, job opportunities for older people tend to be limited to more vulnerable, part-time jobs for women (Douglass 2000). More women than men who want to work but cannot find any say they need the money (Japan Women’s Watch [JAWW] 2009).

costs<sup>4)</sup> on clients and shifted from providing services to supporting self-help<sup>5)</sup> (Lai 2007). In effect, this passed on more costs and more responsibility to individuals who needed care. The Japanese public accepted such a move as the position of “state beneficiary” carried a stigma, implying that one was not cared for by family. Under the new system, individuals are mandated to make compulsory payments, transforming them into citizens entitled to public care due to their contributions (Coulmas 2007). Such neoliberal policies shift the state’s role from provider to facilitator and elderly individuals’ role from beneficiaries to paying clients. This coincides with a larger global shift toward “successful,” “active,” or “positive” aging that views old age as a time of increased opportunity and possibilities and of individuals with greater control and responsibility over their quality of aging (Cruikshank 2003; Davey and Glasgow 2006).

Over the past decade, Japan has experimented with the introduction of care workers from neighboring countries, as is already being done in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore. These care workers come mainly from Southeast Asian countries such as the Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam (Lai 2007; Ohno 2012). The migration of health and care workers has been extensively researched by Japanese scholars in the areas of nursing (Onuki 2009), caregiving (Lopez 2012; Navallo 2020), and domestic work (Matsumoto 2016). Other researchers (for instance, Ogawa 2012) have shown that the international transfer of the care burden in Japan is part of a broader global “care chain” (Hochschild 2000) in which developed countries pass on their care burden to ethnically different and economically disadvantaged women in other nations, for instance, Southeast Asian nations. The rise in the numbers of women migrating from developing countries to do domestic work and care work in East Asian countries has led to a scrutiny of the kinds of migration streams that develop out of interaction with local welfare and care regimes (Ogawa 2018). In Japan, in particular, the increase in nurses and care workers has also raised questions about how institutional programs such as the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with Southeast Asian nations help with the incorporation of foreign care laborers into both the Japanese market and Japanese society in general (Ohno 2012).

Many discussions at present center on the gendered nature of “solutions” being proposed. Hyper-aging is a gendered issue, and women tend to outlive men and experience aging differently from men. They are more likely to have to care for their elderly husbands, be widowed, and perform more house chores, and yet they also tend to have

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4) These are charges for accommodations, meals, and utilities (referred to as “hotel charges”) in special nursing homes.

5) For example, better oral care, strength training, training to prevent falls and accidents, preventative nursing care.



better social integration than men. For women, particularly the divorced, poverty incidence is higher because of poorer and more insecure employment opportunities during their youth (Wakabayashi and Donato 2006; Calasanti 2010). Women are also likely to be living alone on an income less than 70 percent of that of elderly men who live alone (Japan Women's Watch [JAWW] 2009). And with the shift from three-generation to nuclear families, it is elderly women who have cared for their own parents or in-laws who will more likely receive care through formal, public, or private agencies rather than from their own families (Coulmas 2007). A recent report by the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare indicated that 66 percent of all family caregivers were women and that over half of these were over sixty years old (Japan, MHLW 2016b). A gendered focus on these issues is crucial in analyzing the challenges of aging in Japan and the strategies employed to meet them. Gender functions as a powerful structuring discourse affecting perceptions of who gives and receives care and who has the resources to purchase or secure it.

### **Situating the Rise of Filipino Communities in Japan**

Since the issuance of Presidential Decree 442 in 1974, the Philippine state has relied on labor export as an economic strategy (Battistella 1999; Rodriguez 2010).<sup>6)</sup> After five decades of labor export, there are over ten million Filipinos in more than two hundred countries worldwide as temporary and permanent migrants (Commission on Filipinos Overseas 2013). Given this exceptionally long engagement with migration, scholars have begun to recognize the necessity of looking into the experiences of aging Filipino migrants who are overseas. Research from top migrant destinations such as Canada and the United States shows that elderly Filipinos suffer from poverty and economic insecurity (Coloma and Pino 2016; Ferrer 2017; Ferrer *et al.* 2020); continue to provide support to their families—not only financially (Coloma and Pino 2016) but also by acting as caregivers to their grandchildren (Treas and Mazumdar 2004; Kataoka-Yahiro 2010); find existing caregiving services to be inadequate or undesirable (Kimura and Browne 2009); and see return migration as an option in old age (Pido 2017). The dearth and relative recency of studies on aging Filipino migrants, a well-studied group among migration scholars, is testament to how little attention is paid to this subject. However, the experience of aging Filipino migrants overseas cannot be said to be the same for all; the context of Japan as a destination for Filipino migrants is unique and deserves its own particular attention.

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6) The Labor Code of the Philippines includes a directive to promote overseas employment.

Filipino migration to Japan has been predominantly feminine, with women migrating from the Philippines in large numbers during Japan's economic boom in the early 1980s to the mid-2000s as entertainers on temporary work visas and many settling as wives of Japanese men (with some recruited specifically as brides for Japanese men in rural areas). This coincided with the feminization of Filipino overseas worker deployment: from the mid-1980s, over 60 percent of new hires were women recruited as domestic workers within Asia, the Middle East, and Europe and as Overseas Performing Artists (OPAs) in Japan (Ogaya 2006). In 2005, following a report from the US State Department identifying Japan as a Tier 2 trafficking destination, restrictions on granting OPA visas were heightened and the number of Filipinas who entered Japan as entertainers decreased sharply.

From a little over twelve thousand registered Filipinos in Japan in 1985 (Takahata 2015), the Filipino population in 2019 stood at 277,409 (see Table 1), with 131,933 having permanent resident status and 26,699 carrying the status of a spouse or child of a Japanese national.<sup>7)</sup> Of the overall resident Filipino population in Japan, 70 percent are female. Many permanent and long-term migrants are women who have married Japanese men, so this proportion is even more strongly skewed for those beyond the age of 35 (see

**Table 1** Population Statistics for Filipino Residents in Japan by Age and Sex

| Age   | Both Sexes | Male Population | Male % | Female Population | Female % |
|-------|------------|-----------------|--------|-------------------|----------|
| Total | 277,409    | 83,231          | 30.0%  | 194,178           | 70.0%    |
| 0–4   | 7,974      | 4,025           | 50.5%  | 3,949             | 49.5%    |
| 5–9   | 8,463      | 4,281           | 50.6%  | 4,182             | 49.4%    |
| 10–14 | 8,983      | 4,473           | 49.8%  | 4,510             | 50.2%    |
| 15–19 | 9,587      | 4,673           | 48.7%  | 4,914             | 51.3%    |
| 20–24 | 19,835     | 9,604           | 48.4%  | 10,231            | 51.6%    |
| 25–29 | 36,887     | 18,377          | 49.8%  | 18,510            | 50.2%    |
| 30–34 | 32,913     | 14,644          | 44.5%  | 18,269            | 55.5%    |
| 35–39 | 33,612     | 8,365           | 24.9%  | 25,247            | 75.1%    |
| 40–44 | 30,609     | 4,763           | 15.6%  | 25,846            | 84.4%    |
| 45–49 | 34,055     | 3,421           | 10.0%  | 30,634            | 90.0%    |
| 50–54 | 31,057     | 2,876           | 9.3%   | 28,181            | 90.7%    |
| 55–59 | 15,196     | 1,966           | 12.9%  | 13,230            | 87.1%    |
| 60–64 | 5,650      | 1,083           | 19.2%  | 4,567             | 80.8%    |
| 65–69 | 1,865      | 494             | 26.5%  | 1,371             | 73.5%    |
| 70–74 | 495        | 131             | 26.5%  | 364               | 73.5%    |
| 75–79 | 128        | 26              | 20.3%  | 102               | 79.7%    |
| 80+   | 100        | 29              | 29.0%  | 71                | 71.0%    |

Source: Japanese Ministry of Justice, Resident Foreigner Statistics, June 2019 (E-stat 2021a, compiled by authors).

7) Official Statistics of Japan (E-stat 2021a).

Table 1). Through settlement, the population of Filipina migrants in Japan is now aging (see Table 1); the majority are in the age bracket of forty to sixty, and many of them arrived in the late 1990s to early 2000s. The migrants are dispersed in both urban and rural parts of the country, unlike other migrants, who are concentrated in specific areas where industries are dense (Piquero-Ballescás 2009).

The increase in the Filipino population in Japan has been accompanied by numerous stereotypes and discourses that limit them to specific, feminine social roles and stymie their potential. Many are employed in poorly valued (even if not always poorly paid) occupations where mostly women are employed (e.g., club hostesses, chambermaids, factory workers) and are under social pressure to perform their roles as good mothers and wives if they are married and/or have children (Faier 2008). Early researchers highlighted how Filipinas were depicted as falling under one or the other of two extremes—wife/whore or, a related dichotomy, victim/exploiter (Shimizu 1996; Suzuki 2003; Nakamatsu 2005; Fuwa and Anderson 2006).<sup>8)</sup> These critiques exposed the multiple limiting constructions that many Filipinas in Japan faced in searching for other employment and integrating into Japanese society. Additional challenges included adjusting to Japanese culture and gaining literacy in the Japanese language (Ofreño and Samonte 2005; Umeda 2009). All these difficulties together render Filipinas some of the most vulnerable foreign migrants in Japanese society. Filipinos have a divorce rate just under the national average (Japan, MHLW 2016a),<sup>9)</sup> a higher likelihood of being victims of domestic violence (Solidarity Network with Migrants Japan 2014),<sup>10)</sup> and a typically large age gap with their husbands, which means some will be more likely to be widowed (Sakurai 2002). As such, many Filipinas who divorce or survive deceased partners with children face the risk of experiencing different levels of poverty as they negotiate growing older in Japan.

In the last decade, with mounting pressure to supply care labor for an aging populace, both the Japanese state and private enterprises have turned to Filipinas, among other settled migrant workers in Japan, as a source of affective labor.<sup>11)</sup> In 2006 Japan and the Philippines ratified the Japan-Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement. On paper,

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8) A more complex analysis of the discursive maneuvering of the image from prostitute to wife material by marriage brokers was carried out by Nakamatsu Tomoko (2005). Suzuki Nobue (2003) complicates the picture of rural Japanese farmers' Filipina wives as passive victims by looking at their struggle to obtain economic autonomy and establish themselves as sexual subjects.

9) In 2018 this stood at 31 percent for marriages between Japanese males and Filipina women, and for Japanese couples the national average stood at 35.5 percent (see E-stat 2021b).

10) Data from a national government center on domestic violence show that from 2014 to 2017, Filipinos comprised 30–40 percent of non-Japanese callers (PCCC 2019).

11) It is important to note that Japan also sources care labor from other Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia, Vietnam, and—more recently—Myanmar and Cambodia.

this provided a clause to alleviate Japan's need for care workers and meet the Philippines' need for expanding the market for its prime export: skilled laborers (Onuki 2009). Prior to this policy move were efforts by enterprising businesses and concerned non-profit organizations to fill the care labor gap through the recruitment of Filipina mothers of Japanese children—both from the Philippines (many of the women possess the right to reside and work in Japan) and from those already residing legally in Japan (Takahata 2015). Such use of Filipinas' labor was made possible through their being discursively constructed as being “naturally” skilled or “gifted” at care work (Onuki 2009; Lopez 2012); very experienced in it; or having done care work as hostesses, wives, and mothers in Japan (Lopez 2012; Takahata 2015). The development of this new labor niche should be viewed with caution—on the one hand, it may be seen as providing Filipinas with socially valued jobs; on the other, it can be seen as another instance of the “imposition of constituted categories” (Lopez 2012, 265).

In the context of the increasing currency of the notions of individual responsibility and independence in old age, and migrant labor (including Filipina migrant labor) alleviating some of the problems of a rapidly aging Japanese society, what processes and practices or strategies for caring for oneself while aging become available to aging Filipina migrants in Japan? And might there be alternative forms of responsibility and independence that figure in their practices and strategies for securing “successful” aging?

## Methodology

This paper employs a methodology that builds on two critical psychologies: Sikolohiyang Pilipino<sup>12)</sup> (SP, or indigenous Filipino psychology; see Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino 2000; and Paredes-Canilao and Babaran-Diaz 2013) and feminist psychology (Denzin and Lincoln 2008; Fox *et al.* 2009). Critical psychology is distinguished by its interest in power—how it operates and how it is used by, for, or against people (Prilleltensky and Nelson 2002). Both Sikolohiyang Pilipino and feminist psychology have provided con-

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12) Sikolohiyang Pilipino is both an academic discipline and a movement begun in the 1970s, spearheaded by the psychologist Virgilio Enriquez. It is an approach to understanding the Filipino psyche rooted in Filipinos' experiences, perspectives, and orientation (Enriquez 1976), with theories and methods derived from local culture and languages, with the objective of knowledge benefiting the most marginalized in society (Santiago and Enriquez 1976). At its inception, it was a response to the largely American and colonial foundations of the social sciences in the Philippines. With continued critique and development from theorists and practitioners from various fields and disciplines, SP has become more mainstream in Philippine academia and has been productively applied to research, program development, and advocacy work in other countries (Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino 2000; Estrada-Claudio 2018).

ceptual, theoretical, and methodological handles for critiquing psychology's role in oppressing groups of people (e.g., women, the Filipino underclass) and for producing more empowering knowledge. Foundational to both is the recognition of research as a political activity; of language as a bearer and producer of culture and ideologies; and of the importance of cultural, social, and historical contexts concerned with individual human behavior and mental processes.

SP has previously been pointed out to have been inadequate at critiquing patriarchy in Philippine society (Estrada-Claudio 2002), and mainstream feminism (at least in Western, highly industrialized countries) has been said to have poorly addressed matters of ethnicity, culture, and colonialism (Burman 1998). Therefore, the use of SP and feminist psychology for the project this paper draws from was crucial for addressing gender and cultural issues underlying the topic. SP was employed mainly for its consistency with a critical psychological position that allowed for an analysis of individuals' meaning-making not as necessarily or inherently Filipino, but more a cultural product bound to particular social, historical, economic, and political moments. SP, as applied in this study, is most useful for its recognition of the idea that while a shared cultural background is relevant in the experience of these participants and that there may be something identified by the participants and other observers as somehow "Filipino," this must be understood to be worked out in the context of migrant life in Japan. The potential of SP as a movement to produce counter-narratives that interrogate an ahistorical, apolitical conceptualization of Filipinos' experiences, problems, and culture is established elsewhere (Ong 2016). This study reaffirms this and puts forward the utility of using critical approaches together with SP for an analytical framework that can illuminate how habits, practices, ways of looking at the world, and whatever else might be thought of as part of one's identity and as structuring one's relationships and daily life are produced by—and a means to resist—larger social forces in the society one inhabits.<sup>13)</sup>

This methodological framework employs a data-gathering method that allows an engagement with participants' language and experiences that recognizes their capacity for meaning-making. Additionally, it necessitates an analysis that provides a means for identifying the discourses or cultural resources in which such meanings are made. Data-gathering was conducted through the use of *pakikipagkwentuhan* (Orteza 1997), a culturally derived method developed by Sikolohiyang Pilipino scholars to provide an alternative for collecting talk-based data in Filipino communities. This naturalistic method has been proven useful for qualitative, ethnographic studies interested in experiences, subjective

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13) We note that long-term Filipino residents' language is also shaped by Japanese forms of communication through their long-term stay in Japan. As such, we should remain sensitive to the multiple forms of language that informants turn to when communicating their experiences.

views, and meaning-construction. *Pakikipagkwentuhan* is characterized by flexibility and openness and pays particular attention to the quality of the relationship or interaction (*pagtutunguhan*) between the researcher and the participants as this is expected to affect the quality of the data collected (for an extensive exposition, see Orteza 1997; and Javier 2005).

For this project, *pakikipagkwentuhan* was employed with ten women, ranging in age from 48 to 67, from five different prefectures in Japan. Conversations with the participants covered topics such as migration to Japan (reasons, means, initial impressions, etc.), observations and reflections on bodily changes over time, and plans for the future. Each *pakikipagkwentuhan* session lasted about an hour and a half, with participants typically engaging in one or two sessions. This ethnographic approach proved useful for providing insight on widely circulated social discourses that migrants used when speaking about aging, as well as alternative or opposing discourses. In analyzing the data, it was assumed that the specificities of Japan's and the Philippines' cultural, political, economic, and discursive landscape around migration and aging would shape meanings, subjectivities, and material realities for Filipina migrants. In order to better contextualize the data and the resulting analysis, we provide some key demographic information (age, years living in Japan, employment status, marital status, educational status) about the participants in Table 2.

Seven of the ten participants were still employed (some part time) during the interviews. The range of jobs they currently and previously held included: entertainer, small business owner, factory worker, caregiver, housekeeper, English teacher, and interpreter. Many of the participants were also active as community volunteers in church-based or migrant community organizations. Three had previously worked as entertainers in bars around Japan, where they had eventually met their Japanese husbands. All participants had children. Eight were married or previously married to a Japanese man (three of them were divorced), one was married to a Filipino Nikkeijin (foreign-born Japanese). One was the widow of a Filipino man. The lowest educational attainment was second year of high school, but the majority had a college degree, and two had postgraduate education. In recruiting participants for the interviews, the aim was to have access to as diverse a group as possible in order to obtain a variety of experiences and discourses around aging and migration. Although the sample cannot fully represent the views of the wider population of Filipinas in Japan, we argue that their views would be familiar to the larger group given some important commonalities: continued connections to the Philippines, and participation in churches and migrant community groups popular among Filipinos. The utility of this sample is found not in its representativeness but in its ability to produce narratives that have salience for other

**Table 2** Participant Demographic Information

| Participant | Age | Current Employment                                            | Years Living in Japan | Marital Status                                                    | Highest Educational Attainment |
|-------------|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Alli        | 58  | Part-time waitstaff                                           | 29                    | Separated from Filipino husband<br>Divorced from Japanese husband | High school                    |
| Evie        | 67  | Retired. Previously an English teacher                        | 43                    | Married to Japanese husband                                       | Postgraduate                   |
| Cora        | 58  | Semi-retired. Part-time English teacher. Small business owner | 28                    | Married to Japanese husband                                       | College                        |
| Beth        | 60  | Bento factory                                                 | 11                    | Married to Filipino Nikkeijin                                     | High school                    |
| Dana        | 52  | Caregiver                                                     | 28                    | Divorced from Japanese husband                                    | College                        |
| Fara        | 50  | None                                                          | 24                    | Married to Japanese husband                                       | High school                    |
| Gina        | 62  | Interpreter                                                   | 38                    | Married to Japanese husband                                       | College                        |
| Hope        | 55  | English teacher                                               | 35                    | Married to Japanese husband                                       | College                        |
| Imee        | 48  | Fruit packer                                                  | 17                    | Divorced from Japanese husband                                    | High school                    |
| Jeng        | 66  | Housekeeper                                                   | 31                    | Widowed (Filipino husband)                                        | Postgraduate                   |

Filipina migrants in Japan and possibly for understanding the experiences of other aging migrant groups that share important similarities.

Each session was recorded digitally and later transcribed. Thematic analysis (as outlined by Braun and Clarke 2006) was applied to the data with a post-structuralist approach to language in order to produce an analysis that makes connections between individual subjectivity and larger social discourses.<sup>14)</sup> The goal is not to capture truth as such but to situate a specific truth within the context in which it was produced, used, or deployed. Therefore, the interest of the analysis is in the various subject positions made available to Filipina migrants in Japan by existing discourses around aging and migrants, the truths they claim or make from these positions, and the consequences that arise from these truths.

14) A poststructuralist approach allows for interest in language to constitute subjectivity and reality rather than reflect an objective reality or provide access to one's thoughts or dispositions (see Weedon 1997; and Potter and Wetherell 1987).

## Embodying Successful Aging through the Management of Finances

Many participants expressed fears or worries about becoming a burden to their children as they aged. They saw it as their responsibility to ensure that they had the financial capacity to meet their needs in the years to come. Several (Beth, Evie, Gina, and Cora) mentioned living more simply and consciously spending less on nonessentials (e.g., designer goods, eating out, travel). Three (Hope, Gina, and Jeng) had already begun to establish businesses to ensure a steady and adequate income, and some were planning to do business in the Philippines or in Japan. More overwhelmingly, participants reported being conscientious about paying for their insurance (of which there are many types and options) to ensure that they received pensions and had medical coverage when they needed it and avoided at all costs becoming state dependents. In one session, Imee talked about these financial concerns:

**Imee:** See, here in Japan, it's better (than in the Philippines) because here, 60, 65, you can work as long as you can do it. And then here there is a pension when you turn 65, but I don't like to depend on the pension. I think it feels better if you're working. Or have your own income. See, here it feels like, if you say one is pensioned it's like you're merely dependent on the nation's tax, that's what it feels like. So, it's different when you're, like, still strong enough to work. . . . Yeah, you can't stay forever in the Philippines because first of all, there, when you get to 65, you won't be able to work anymore, and you only get a pension at the start. Aside from that, the government here helps with the . . . we have a health card here where you pay, really, only a small amount. . . . Yes [you do pay for it] but it's really affordable. They know your age, that you can't pay very much, so that's it. . . . Whatever happens, here [in Japan], as long as you have a health card and you're qualified, you can go to a hospital without paying a single cent.<sup>15)</sup>

One prevalent theme in participants' explanations of their plans and ideas for their old age, as exemplified in Imee's account above, is that better possibilities are available to them because they are migrants in Japan, and that they must be responsible and take advantage of these opportunities—the opportunity to continue working past 65 (albeit in insecure, low-paid jobs), to pay for insurance that ensures affordable care in the future, and to earn a pension. Participants made comparisons between the opportunities for financial security in the Philippines and in Japan. They arrived at the conclusion that being a migrant in Japan had afforded them certain advantages for securing “successful” aging. These observations are not without merit: data on the elderly in the Philippines show that they tend to be poor, employed in agricultural work or in the informal sector,

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15) This is not entirely true, as individuals are required to shoulder 30 percent of medical costs in Japan. However, that this perception is expressed here strengthens the notion that in Japan, health care is accessible to conscientious individuals who make the effort to be consistent with their contributions.



and unlikely to receive a pension or have access to affordable health care (DSWD and DOH 2007; Abalos 2018). In comparison, Japanese elderly who contribute to the national pension system for forty years and have national health insurance can receive a pension of around 780,100 Japanese yen per annum (Japan Pension Service 2021) and support for at least 70 percent of health-care costs.<sup>16)</sup>

However, other perspectives offered a more nuanced view. Two other respondents, Evie and Cora, brought up the fact that hospitalization can be very expensive even with insurance, which does not cover room cost (according to Evie). In addition, Evie observed that the cost of living in Japan was increasing, that pensions were not always enough, and that “everybody worries about it now.” In light of these observations, it becomes clear that although the ability to work past age 65, the availability of health insurance, and the opportunity to contribute to a pension fund may be seen as opportunities unavailable in the Philippines, they may also be regarded as necessities—not only by migrants but by the vast majority of people growing older in Japan. To make this clear, Evie remarked, “If you had worked here [in Japan] and contributed to the pension fund somehow, you get some, somehow. But if zero [contributions], then nothing. Only from your children then, if you live with them.” This call to choose to work and purchase insurance is a possible outcome of a “taxpayer citizenship,” which constructs some groups of people (i.e., taxpayers) as more “deserving” of citizenship rights or support from the state (Cruikshank 2003; King 2006). Imee’s poor regard for the status of pensioners, who are “merely dependent on the nation’s tax,” is reflective of this view of citizenship and hints at the low status occupied by those who are not “strong enough” to continue working, to contribute to the pension fund, and to pay for health insurance.

Migrants, especially women, are disadvantaged under a system that privileges these ways of securing financial stability because they will have worked for fewer years in the country and will have been limited in the job and employment type (contractual, part-time employment rather than permanent, full-time employment) available to them (McLaren and Dyck 2004; Yakushko 2009; Bolzman 2012). Additionally, in Japan social capital (networks, group memberships) rather than human capital (skills, qualifications, or work experience) has been found to determine immigrants’ earning capacity—an indicator of the poorer labor market opportunities for and discrimination against migrants (Tsuda 2011). The participants in this study were typically employed part time, usually waiting

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16) These amounts may be augmented by making additional contributions, and through other pension schemes (both public and private). It must be noted that these modest amounts are far from enough to guarantee a comfortable and worry-free life in Japan, where the cost of living is high. Also, one may receive even less if one has not contributed consistently, worked fewer hours or years than the average employee, or is divorced from an employed husband.

after their children had grown to find employment (except one who was never allowed by her husband to work). There were those who spoke at length about the difficulties of finding work that they found meaningful, satisfying, and financially adequate given the challenges of language and family obligations (taking care of their spouse and children in Japan and sending remittances back to the Philippines). And yet, they endorsed a discourse of personal responsibility for financial stability in old age as it is strongly associated with the positively regarded identity of the responsible older person in Japan. Despite the disadvantages they face as migrants, as Filipinas, and as older persons in Japan, they are not exempt from investing great amounts of physical, emotional, and financial resources to avoid being a burden to their children and society.

## Managing Health

Other than finances, all participants reported feeling concerned about and responsible for their health. Some identified natural changes in old age, work conditions, stress, and genes as reasons for their current health complaints. However, a strong theme running through stories about health, particularly in the maintenance of good health, was the idea of responsibility and self-control. Many participants endorsed the idea of responsibility for health and reported controlling what they ate, exercising (or planning to exercise), consuming health supplements, seeking advice from medical practitioners, and seeking and evaluating health-related information (from television, seminars, and the Internet) in order to maintain or regain good health. The imperative to take responsibility for one's health found in participants' accounts can be seen in this extended discussion with Fara:

**Fara:** Here in Japan, you really need to go get a checkup all the time. See here, I don't know how it is for others, but me and my husband we go get a medical checkup every year. Because, when you get to forty [years of age], you're obliged to get a checkup.

**Author (interviewer):** Yearly?

**Fara:** Yearly.

**Author:** You have to pay for that?

**Fara:** Yes, of course you have to pay. And there's also insurance here. Like health insurance in the Philippines. You're really obliged to um . . .

**Author:** How come you say obliged? You can't not get a checkup?

**Fara:** No, it's not that. Here in Japan, there are people who don't go for checkups, and then they'll find out when they get sick that it's already very bad. There are cases like that. So that's why they say when you get to forty, that's when your body starts to, um [deteriorate], you'll start to feel a lot [going wrong], so while it's early you need to go on checkups so they can catch it early. Especially the Japanese. It's often cancer that they get. As much as possible, to avoid or solve it immediately, you need to go on your checkups all the time.

Such actions and such a way of thinking are consistent with a growing healthism, a term coined by the cultural studies scholar Robert Crawford (1980) upon observing that health was becoming a moral and social concern (particularly for the American middle class). The concern for health expanded to include more holistic notions of well-being and success, coming to define good citizenship and positive personal identities (Crawford 2006). Self-control in and self-responsibility for health can have important symbolic value even though perfect health can never be guaranteed (Crawford 2006). In the context of aging, the concern for maintaining the health of a body that is progressively moving farther from the ideal of a youthful one has important implications for subjectivity, as evidenced by participants calling themselves “lazy” or implying they were “irresponsible” or “selfish” for being unable or unwilling to pursue health effectively. Compounding the pressure to be responsible older citizens pursuing successful aging is the perception that a major barrier to health—the high cost of health care and monitoring—has been eliminated or drastically reduced in Japan compared to the Philippines. Several other participants note that health care is free or far more affordable in Japan. (For instance, Jeng said, “Thank God, I have general checkups, and that’s free.<sup>17)</sup> That’s what’s great here in Japan, you’re taken care of.”) There is, among participants’ accounts, a “no legitimate dependency” discourse. Within this discourse, there are no valid reasons for dependency as everything that happens in one’s life is one’s personal responsibility; and so, asking for help, or even acknowledging the need for it, is seen as an unacceptable admission of weakness (Peacock *et al.* 2014). For migrants who are regarded with negativity or suspicion, poor health—which may be seen as a result of the poor utilization of “free” health services in Japan—can be read as a willful rejection of the responsibility to stay healthy.

And yet, Beth suggested that her work may have been at least partially responsible for her contracting diabetes,<sup>18)</sup> and Imee’s back problem is not likely to improve given that her job requires her to lift heavy objects. Beth’s limited understanding of Japanese makes doctor visits challenging for her and requires that a family member (with better ability) accompany her. On occasion, she has delayed consulting with a doctor for a health issue because no family member was available to go with her. The difficulties that Filipina

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17) This statement is the informant’s perception. General health checkups are not free; costs can vary from one location to another in Japan. However, this perception is a point of interest as it reflects the way in which migrants understand their place in Japan in terms of obligations and responsibilities as represented materially by taxes, pension contributions, and insurance payments.

18) Beth said, “[A]s I said, ‘Doc, maybe that’s how I got diabetes because when I was working the night shift it made me sleepy. I had nothing to take my mind off it but to put my hand in my pocket, which was full of chocolate. I didn’t take care of myself. But when I was in the Philippines, I did often check . . . my sugar. . . I suppose it’s also my fault that I got it [diabetes].” Beth explained her night work was a factor, but she also claimed responsibility for having developed diabetes.

migrants in Japan experience—poor facility with the Japanese language, poor treatment from health workers, and poorer employment opportunities, which impact on their health—can be obscured by the dominant discourse of self-responsibility for health.

### Exploring Transnational Retirement: The Modern Retiree Migrant's Strategy for Success

Asked about their plans for the future, half of the participants said they would prefer to eventually go home to the Philippines—either to live there permanently or to travel regularly between the Philippines and Japan.<sup>19)</sup> They explained that settling in the Philippines meant being able to enjoy a comfortable life (physically, socially, and financially), warm weather throughout the year, the company and care of family members and community (which they say is not likely in Japan), and a lower cost of living. As Fara said, “As long as you have money in the Philippines, life is good in the Philippines.” As the discussion goes further, we will interrogate this statement to show what it implies about what a good life is, the differences between Japan and the Philippines, and the necessity of money.

All participants generally spoke highly of the Japanese government's support for the elderly<sup>20)</sup> (see previous discussions), and of Japan as a safe, peaceful, and beautiful place to live in. And yet, quite a few planned to go back to the Philippines in their old age because they had negative views of elderly life and care in Japan, as articulated by Dana:

**Dana:** Back home [in the Philippines], when you grow old, even if, say, no one takes care of you, the neighbors won't let anything happen to you. Isn't it like that back home? I suppose it depends, I don't know how it is in other places, but in our town, I, we had a neighbor there, the old person was living alone, my relative would bring him/her food all the time. Gives them a shower. Takes care of them even if they're not related. Just neighbors. It seems we have what the Japanese call *ataakai* [warmth]. We have love, care. We have all of that.

**Author:** It seems odd they have that word, *ataakai*, but you don't see them doing that for their neighbor.

**Dana:** Oh no. Here nobody minds anybody. The best thing about Japan, you know what it is? Discipline. . . . Really, their discipline is great. Number One. But when it comes to love, it's lacking. *Tarinai*<sup>21)</sup> [not enough], in Japanese. . . . They're like that, too. They have it too. Anywhere

19) Participants who want to keep their permanent resident's visa must travel to Japan yearly.

20) Other researchers have shown that Filipinas who work in care homes can develop opposing views. It is important to make clear here that a wide range of views are available and that the views depend on the vantage points and experiences of researchers and informants.

21) To clarify the use of the Japanese adjective *tarinai*, the original conversation in Tagalog is “Pero sasabihin mo yung love nila, lack. *Tarinai* kumbaga sa Japanese.”

you go there is that. But if you want *ataakai*,<sup>22)</sup> or you want it good, well, since I'd already worked so hard here, what I want is, when I go home, when you grow old, you're in the Philippines. You'll have a good, uh, even if your life is not all good but your environment is. Here, when you grow old, it's all the same. Your children are busy, too. . . . I'm afraid to grow old here. . . . When I'm old I might get shouted at by my daughters-in-law. That happens often here.

In Dana's account, as in others' stories, care provision in Japan (whether in homes, living with or close to family or by oneself, or in communal homes run by public or private organizations) is contrasted highly with that in the Philippines and evaluated to be unacceptable. Love, concern, or caring is seen to be absent or in short supply in Japan, while the Philippines is idealized to have these in great amounts ("We have love, care. We have all of that"). While clearly and consistently described to be poorer or deficient in other accounts (see above discussions on managing health and finances), the Philippines is almost romanticized as having an abundance of love or warmth for the elderly.

As a way of meeting their needs for a "loving" community in old age, many participants, even the three who said they would not want to permanently live in the Philippines as they grew older (Evie, Gina, and Imee), plan to practice what is now known in scholarly literature as transnational retirement (Gustafson 2001; Toyota and Xiang 2012). Transnational retirement, a fairly recent phenomenon where retirees set up residence in another country in order to maximize their pensions and enjoy a preferred lifestyle, has been made possible by more affordable transportation, greater ease in communication, greater longevity, affluence, globalized systems (Gorringer 2003), changes in lifestyle preferences, and the increasingly common experience of living and working abroad (Gustafson 2008). This practice is one way of doing or imagining aging where individuals maximize their pensions, allowing pensions considered modest or insufficient in one country to afford them better health care, caregiving, and leisure options in another (Gorringer 2003; Bolzman *et al.* 2006; Warnes and Williams 2006; Percival 2013). This strategy is a logical outcome of successful aging's call to self-sufficiency, responsibility, and consumption (Laliberte 2006).

Unique to the participants as migrants to Japan is the option of transnational retirement in a country that they regard (also) to be home, unlike the situation of other transnational migrants more typically discussed in the current literature (for instance, Swedish retirees residing in Spain during winter in Gustafson 2001). The participants who wanted to live in the Philippines clearly articulated the financial advantages of doing

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22) To clarify the use of the Japanese adjective *ataakai*, the original conversation in Tagalog is "Meron din sila nun, kahit saan naman yun eh. Pero kung gusto mo ng *ataakai* or maganda kasi eh siyempre naghirap na ako dito, gusto ko naman paguwi ko, pagtanda mo, nasa Pilipinas ka. Masarap ang ano mo. Kahit hindi masarap ang buhay mo basta yung kapaligiran mo ba."

so, but all participants wished to go there on a regular basis to visit their hometown and families (extended and immediate—a few had children, grandchildren, and parents there). Those who decided they would live in Japan permanently said that their children were there and that the cost of health care in the Philippines was a worry; this worry about finances in the Philippines in case of an emergency was one that was recognized even by those who planned to live there permanently. This dilemma is best summed up in the following excerpt:

**Cora:** But I'm thinking if I go home like for Medicare, or medical needs, I'm disadvantaged in the Philippines. But the sadness, I'm disadvantaged here. And here, you'll be imprisoned [in a home for the elderly]—you haven't got a lot to talk to. If you're alone. You could die here and your neighbor wouldn't know. Right? But as for hospitalization, all of those things, I'm for here [Japan]. See, here, the [Japanese] government will not neglect you. . . . In the Philippines . . . if you get sick, where will you run if you don't have any money? But then again, it's lonely [here in Japan]. Whereas there, your neighbor, especially if you like to talk, since you're there anyway, you can make friends, you'll be occupied. Even if you start to argue, at least you have someone to argue with.

Cora's back-and-forth comparing the advantages and disadvantages of the Philippines and Japan mirrors the back-and-forth travel that participants plan to do in order to try and gain as much of the positive from both countries as they can: enjoy the perceived peace and (relative) prosperity of Japan and the warm weather and relationships they have nurtured over the years in the Philippines. It also reflects the fact that, despite the seeming expansion of their options as migrants in Japan, the kind of comfortable aging they imagine—one with financial security, relatively good health and access to health services, and meaningful relationships with family and community—remains elusive for most. Although one may take responsibility for one's aging through being conscientious about one's health and finances, transnational retirement between Japan and one's home country may be an important strategy for migrants to take care of their well-being that goes beyond physical and financial health and into claiming one's place in a network of warm and valued interdependent relationships with others.

### **Conclusion: Never Enough in Old Age**

In studies on migration within, from, and to Southeast Asia, those that focus on the social context and individual life experience of aging remain at the margins. Many of the existing themes in migration studies in Southeast Asia, such as citizenship and political integration, health, employment, family life, care labor, and transnational parenting, can

benefit from some attention to aging. In light of the dominance of successful or positive aging discourses in many societies globally, including Asia—where interdependence and filial responsibility are valued—it is increasingly important to investigate how the themes of independence and self-responsibility shape the lived realities and subjectivities not only of non-migrant populations but of migrants themselves. These are individuals who are simultaneously regarded as being crucial to their home and host country's economy through their labor and as potential threats to the host country culturally, socially, and economically. They are also individuals whose status is often suspect even when the host country recognizes their contributions but invests little in ensuring that they have the same access to opportunities for education, employment, and social integration that non-migrants enjoy. This has a deep impact on their health, finances, and overall quality of life in old age.

Japan presents an important site for exploring these ideas for at least two reasons: the dominance of studies on European and North American countries as migrant destinations obscures the unique conditions migrants face in other regions such as Southeast Asia and Japan. Additionally, Japan's increasing recognition of the value of migrants as part of its portfolio of responses to its hyper-aging population dilemma can shed more light on responses within East Asia and Japan's greater dependence on Southeast Asian nations. Although the 2019–21 coronavirus pandemic impacted the variegated flows of migrant laborers into Japan, we will continue to see an increased role of migrants as part of the solution to hyper-aging, inevitably leading to a more diversified population, some of whom will settle and age in Japan. This will demand an integrative response in years to come.

Discussions around a rapidly aging Japanese population have centered on the costs of such a population to society in general, with migrants growing in state discourse as potentially mitigating the economic and social impact of aging. In more recent years, global discourses and policy making on aging have come to reflect neoliberal ideas and focus on individual choice and responsibility for one's aging while diminishing state regulation of and support for services for older people (Coole 2011). The image of the "modern retiree" enjoying "positive" or "successful" aging in popular discourse has been criticized as being deceptively empowering, in that aging persons are given power and choices for securing their own well-being but also blamed when they are ill or poor. The discourse of the modern retiree ignores the diverse social contexts and multiple disadvantages individuals can experience over their lifetime that affect their ability to achieve "successful" outcomes in old age.

This paper argues that such a discourse is familiar to and is valued by Filipina migrants in Japan. It shapes how they think about, plan for, and act on their own aging.

They understand that it is their responsibility to manage their own finances, their health, and their care in the future so as to ensure they are not a burden to society and to their families. At the same time, they contest and fashion their own unique discourses which do counter the neoliberal ethic that finds itself diffusing in Japan. This research suggests Filipinas negotiate different neoliberal ideals whilst developing their own distinct paths that are cautious of as well as attuned to dependency. As inhabitants and navigators of two cultures, participants draw upon relevant counter-discourses: the Filipino concept of *kapwa* or shared sense of self (Enriquez 1978) and a Japanese form of idealized dependence (as *amae*) (Alexy 2011). The articulation of both these situates individuals nested in a network of relationships where separation and individuation are not only impossible but also undesirable—a morally and socially inferior way of *being* in these societies. For Filipina migrants, the desire for connectedness and interdependence results in the cultivation of transnational retirement strategies for successful aging. Although individuals may lay claim to a positive subjectivity through acting responsibly in financial and health matters, ultimately the comfortable aging that they claim responsibility for is a tenuous reality whether in Japan or in the Philippines.

While participants also articulate the difficulties and challenges of being older Filipina migrants in Japan, which make the attainment of all these ideals more difficult than for non-migrants, the impetus for self-responsibility and independence in old age remains a powerful structuring discourse that defines their desires, decisions, and practices. As such, it is apparent that despite the seemingly widespread, more positive, alternative discourse of aging that is available, negative discourses around older people and migrants as a burden to society remain prominent. As migrants who continue to be evaluated and scrutinized for their contributions to both Philippine and Japanese society, Filipinas in Japan bear the burden of making enough and being enough for themselves and their families. Yet, their experiences also point to the possibility of examining alternative practices, strategies, and ideals that emanate from within Southeast Asia, a region that, for the foreseeable future, Japan will continue to be tied to in a very intimate fashion.

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