

EDUCATION GOVERNANCE REFORMS AND SKILLS CERTIFICATION OF FILIPINO ENTERTAINMENT WORKERS EXPORTED TO JAPAN (1994–2004)

Mark Maca*

Department of Education, Kyushu University, 744 Motoooka,
Nishi-ku, Fukuoka 819-0395, Japan
E-mail: markmaca@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Japan has a unique role as a niche market for “entertainment work” in the Philippine labour export enterprise. Filipinos first started working there as relatively high-status musicians (kashu) in the 1800s, and continued in such roles during WWII and into the post-war era of United States occupation. But towards the end of the 1970s, the status of migrant Filipino entertainers underwent a transformation, as they became increasingly numerous, overwhelmingly female, and part of the world of mizu shobai (literally “water trade”), as the night-time urban bar scene is euphemistically known. This paper investigates the relationship between this new influx of female entertainers-cum-sex workers, referred to as Japayuki, and twin development strategies initiated by the Marcos regime: promotion of tourism (including “sex tourism”) and related cultural activities; and labour export. It analyses the link between the Japayuki phenomenon and the education reforms introduced during Marcos’ “New Society” experiment (1965–1986) and further elaborated by succeeding governments—especially the mechanisms for certifying women as qualified entertainers. A major factor identified here is the decentralisation (and segmentation) of the country’s education system, completed in 1994, which have made it vulnerable to patronage politics and corruption. This is illustrated in the case of the 2004 Japayuki certification scandal, which shows how the technical-

vocational education sector was rendered complicit in legitimising the export of Filipino labour for semi-illicit employment in Japan.

Keywords: Education governance, technical-vocational education, Filipino entertainment workers, *Japayuki*, Artist Record Book

BACKGROUND

Whilst the global diffusion of Filipinos as musicians and entertainers began as early as the 19th century, when their presence is documented as far afield as Bihar in India (cf. Atkins 2001; Quirino 2004), historical studies on the contemporary wave of migrant entertainment workers since the late 20th century are relatively few and far between. Ng (2006) has written on Filipino bands performing in key Asian cities, and De Dios (2015) analysed the different categories of Overseas Filipino Musicians catering to different niche markets. The Philippine government officially refers to migrant entertainers as Filipino Overseas Performing Artists (OPAs), a category encompassing magicians and karaoke lounge hostesses as well as some of the best bands on the Asian hotel circuit. They perform in a wide range of venues from five-star hotels to cruise liners and international chain pubs. Beyond Asia too, OPAs work as far afield as the Netherlands, France, Italy, Portugal, Switzerland and Germany, the Pacific islands of Saipan and Palau, Djibouti in Africa, and on cruise ships plying North American and Caribbean routes (Ng 2006). In Japan, many can be found working in tiny karaoke lounges where entertaining entails singing with guests, and sometimes servicing them sexually—a pattern of work associated with the migrant entertainers known as *Japayuki*.¹ It is with this group that the present paper is principally concerned.

Most research on Filipino entertainment work has been conducted within the migration studies paradigm, with further contributions from fields including gender studies (cf. Tyner 1996, 1997, 2003 and 2004), cultural anthropology (Suzuki 2008, 2011; Faier 2009), family studies² (cf. Fuwa 1999), and research on sex trafficking (Parreñas 2011), globalisation and the gendering of migrant labour (Tyner 2004; Rodriguez 2010; Guevarra 2010). References to *Japayuki* frequently feature in historical studies of post-WWII Filipino migration to Japan or of Japan-Philippines relations more generally. Reports on the conditions of Filipino contract entertainers performing in Japan, often funded by non-governmental organisations, women's groups and human rights organisations, have highlighted issues such as the exploitative nature of their employment, and the impact of their work on their families

(i.e., the prevalence of family break-up amongst this group) (cf. Ballescas 1992; Medina et al. 1995; Osteria 1994; De Dios 1992).³ Much research in this area has, understandably, been largely activist or polemical in intent, and less concerned with analysis and historical contextualisation.

One issue seldom discussed in existing work on the migration of Filipina entertainers to Japan is the role of education in this phenomenon. However, this dimension is critical to understanding the dynamics within the “sending” state or society (the Philippines), especially as these relate to the management or facilitation of labour export in this sector. The relative neglect of this issue in the scholarly literature can be partly attributed to the fact that the relevant institutions—in the technical-vocational education sector—tend to be less studied than more formal, academic colleges and universities. In tackling this issue, the present paper builds on earlier studies⁴ of the role of education in the history of Filipino labour migration from the American colonial period (Maca 2017) to the era of the Marcos dictatorship (Maca 2018). This paper is narrowly focused on a specific period (1994–2004), where certain aspects of Filipina entertainers’ deployment highlight the degree of complicity (unintended or otherwise) of education policies implemented towards the labour export program.

This paper relates especially closely to a previous study by the present author investigating the link between education reform and the use of labour export as part of a strategy for economic development under the Marcos regime. Here, I extend that previous work by focusing on the consequences of a combination of decentralised educational governance⁵ and the regime’s drive, from the mid-1970s, to develop tourism to maximise foreign-currency earnings. While the latter was partly intended to burnish the country’s international image (Tyner 1996, 1997), the subsequent boom in visitor numbers was associated with a rapid rise in sex tourism. As we shall see, this phenomenon was in turn linked to the later export of Filipina “entertainers” to Japan.

It was not until the early years of the new century that the role of educational institutions in this burgeoning industry attracted significant public notice, when the technical-vocational education sector was implicated in a “certification-for-sale” scandal involving Japan-bound entertainment workers. Here, I argue that this incident must be understood at least in part as an outcome of the fragmentation of administrative oversight of the education and certification systems initiated in the latter years of Marcos’ rule. I suggest that one conclusion to be drawn is that the absence of strong or consistent state oversight will tend to encourage the corruption or distortion of certification arrangements in an education system geared primarily towards facilitating the

overseas deployment of labour. But the fact that the system was allowed to develop in this way also indicates certain underlying truths about the political and social order in both the contemporary Philippines and in Japan—though the principle focus here is on the former.

The paper is divided into four sections. The first section traces the history of Filipino overseas entertainment work back to jazz musicians, who were pioneers in the migration of entertainers to Japan (and elsewhere) from the late 19th century to the early postwar years. I then show how Marcos' introduction of the labour export policy in 1973 triggered a reclassification of Filipino musicians and artists by the Japanese immigration authorities who lumped them under the generic category of “entertainers.” The second section analyses the links between the Marcos government's tourism campaign, the subsequent rise in sex tourism and the advent of the *Japayuki* era. The third section analyses education reforms initiated under the Marcos government (1965–1986), and maintained or further elaborated by his successors, which have had direct implications for the continuing export of labour in the “entertainment” sector. Finally, the last part investigates how these reforms ultimately transformed related forms of technical-vocational education, and skills certification in particular, into means of legitimating what some have seen as state-sponsored trafficking of women for sex (cf. De Dios 1992; Tyner 2004; Rodriguez 2010). As of 2018, this *Japayuki* phenomenon is still happening but on a significantly smaller scale than in the 1990s as extensively covered in current literature (cf. Parreñas 2011 for the latest and so far most comprehensive English-language study on Filipina *Japayukis*). One limitation of the paper involves the author's inability to read relevant literature in Japanese, but the primary focus here is on the Filipino side of this issue, and its relationship with domestic arrangements for training and certification. Meanwhile, a few attempts were made by the author to interview former and current Technical Education Skills and Development Authority (TESDA) officials to shed light on the Artist Record Book (ARB)/*Japayuki* scandal (officially on record or otherwise) but they refused, with a very dismissive attitude of the issue as “history.”

FILIPINO JAZZ MUSICIANS AS PIONEER ENTERTAINMENT WORKERS

Filipinos entered the Japanese entertainment scene from an early date as musical and athletic performers (Suzuki 2008). In the 1880s, Filipinos were already widely admired as musicians (*kashu*), and a few gained celebrity status

in the 1920s at the height of the fashion for American jazz music. Many of these mostly male performers were recruited by European orchestras and later by American jazz bands upon United States annexation of the Philippines at the turn of the 20th century (Yu-Jose 2007). Boxers are another set of Filipino entertainers who enjoyed a high reputation in Japan from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. Until the 1970s, Japanese fighters vainly aspired to world titles, and were left admiring the fighting skills of boxers from the Philippines, a country in which the sport was more highly developed (Suzuki 2006).

Filipino jazz musicians can be considered as pioneer migrants in the Japanese entertainment sector. As United States colonials, they were acculturated to American popular and dance music in the early twentieth century and many could sing in fluent English, having attended the colonial school system. American entrepreneurs also played a crucial role in recruiting many such musicians for work overseas on cruise ships,⁶ in hotels and dance halls. They toured in major Japanese cities and other parts of Asia from Hong Kong and Shanghai to Bombay (Evangelista 2015). In his history of jazz in Japan, Atkins notes how prominent Japanese musicians and singers recognised Filipinos' musicality and their versatility in interpreting and channelling "authentic" American jazz (Atkins 2001). Japan's earliest jazzmen "certainly regarded musicians from the Philippines as the closest link to America that they could hope to have in the 1920s" (Atkins 2001: 60). These early migrant Filipinos in Japan had a relatively prestigious status:

It is not common knowledge that since the nineteenth century up to the 1960s, almost all Filipino workers in Japan were musicians. Indeed, they were called musicians, not entertainers. Their situation was both similar to and different from the situation of the present Filipino entertainers in Japan. They were popular among the Westernized Japanese of the 1920s and the Japanese middle class of the 1960s (Uchino 1997, cited in Yu-Jose 2007: 61).

Closely related to perceptions of the superior musicality of Filipinos in the jazz genre was their excellent command of the English language. This enabled Filipino groups to market themselves as "American jazz bands." And after the Asia-Pacific War, Filipinos' fluency in English and their ability to sing both Spanish and English songs made them the only significant cohort of Asians in the postwar entertainment scene in Japan.⁷ "They were the best musicians. Japanese singers tried to learn from them" (Alexander 2002, cited in Yu-Jose 2007: 77).

By the 1970s, numerous Filipino bands were playing not only jazz but also rock and roll. There were several thousand Filipino entertainers active in Japan, and numbers had been steadily increasing. Early Filipino bands dominated the clubs on and around the United States bases, and especially those in Okinawa, until Japanese musicians began to take up jazz and rock music in larger numbers (Atkins 2001). Filipino performers were soon found at nightclubs and discos in urban centres across Japan. However, from the 1970s, two factors impacted negatively on the status of these musicians. Firstly, the spread of cheaper (and better quality) recorded music to some extent dented the market for their services. Secondly, especially during the 1980s, male performers rapidly began to be outnumbered by female entertainers brought in to work in Japanese hotels, clubs and bars (Parreñas 2011; Suzuki 2011, 2008).

The latter development was related to a classification “downgrade” for Filipino musical performers, manifested in Japanese immigration regulations. Having previously been categorised as artists and musicians (*kashu*), in the 1981 immigration registry Filipinos suddenly found themselves lumped in the general category of entertainers (Yu-Jose 2007). Previous historical analyses of Filipino “entertainment” work in Japan, both by Japanese and Filipino scholars, identifies this shift in Japan’s immigration and migrant labour regulations as the main factor determining the status of migrant entertainers (cf. Suzuki 2011; Morooka 2007; Yu-Jose 2007). However, this change in immigration category can also be interpreted as a Japanese response to labour export’s transformation into a Philippine state enterprise—a shift whose implications for the entertainment sector I explore in the next section.

The arrival of this new wave of Filipina “entertainers” in Japan was driven by the political and socioeconomic dynamics in both countries between the 1970s and mid-1990s. Officials desperate to find sources of foreign currency to boost the ailing Philippines economy launched an aggressive Philippine tourism campaign that resulted in an influx of male “sex tourists” from an increasingly prosperous Japan.⁸ But a public backlash and official concerns in Japan over the country’s international image prompted a clampdown on “sex tours” to the Philippines. It was in response to that clampdown that the import into Japan of *Japayuki* entertainers took off, as is detailed in the following section.

RISE OF THE PHILIPPINES AS A DESTINATION FOR SEX TOURISM

The emergence of the Philippines as a major destination for sex tourism began during the Vietnam War, when demand from American soldiers stationed in military bases fuelled the rapid growth of entertainment establishments supplying sex alongside other services. As the Vietnam conflict wound down in the mid-1970s, red light districts increasingly sought to develop a new market among foreign tourists. As the Marcos regime's heavy spending on infrastructure development (sourced from foreign loans) witnessed the construction of new hotels and an international airport, Metro Manila became a vital location of the sex industry.⁹ The expansion of the red light district in the nation's capital coincided with the official drive to promote foreign tourism. Sexual entertainment was overtly promoted in tourism materials, as Tyner (1996) notes: "travel brochures, guidebooks, and tourist magazines regularly portrayed the Philippines as a mixture of sexuality and the primitive 'Other'" (Tyner 1996: 82).

The tourism sector brought in much needed dollar income for the Marcos government at the height of an unemployment crisis and mounting trade deficits in the 1970s. At the same time as it was adopting labour export as a major plank of its economic strategy, the government created a Ministry of Tourism in 1973, and ratified a Friendship, Commerce and Navigation Treaty between the Philippines and Japan (Rodriguez 2010).¹⁰ This tourism promotion policy appears to have met with considerable success. The number of foreign visitors, which stood at 144,000 in 1970, jumped to one million by 1980. Japanese visitors comprised the largest cohort. They grew from 16,000 in 1970 to 24,000 in 1973 and to 265,000 by 1980. Having accounted for just 11 percent of total visitors in 1970, by 1980 Japanese comprised over one quarter (Tyner 1997).

Most of the Japanese tourists were male (the male-female ratio was 5:1), and many purchased "entertainment services" from Filipino women. But this phenomenon prompted unease back in Japan regarding the resulting image of Japanese men as roving sexual predators. The Japanese authorities were keen to rein in this practice, and blatant "sex tours" were eventually banned (Suzuki 2000). However, as Tyner notes, what ensued was merely a "shift in venue" (1997: 24): rather than Japanese men travelling to the Philippines, Filipino women were "imported" to satisfy demand in Japan's growing domestic "sex industry."

This occurred in the context of an expanding migration industry that emerged to facilitate the overseas deployment of Filipino labour from the mid-1970s. Involving various actors—from government institutions such as the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, to private recruitment agencies, to individual talent managers and promoters—processes for promoting “entertainment migration” steadily became institutionalised (Rodriguez 2010; Parreñas 2011). This is reflected in Figure 1, which shows a sharp decrease of Japanese visitors to the Philippines starting in 1980, and the number of Filipinos arriving in Japan increasing sharply shortly thereafter. The disaggregation of Japanese immigration data meanwhile reveals a steady increase in the number of Filipino women admitted into Japan holding “entertainer” visas (Ballescás 1992).¹¹

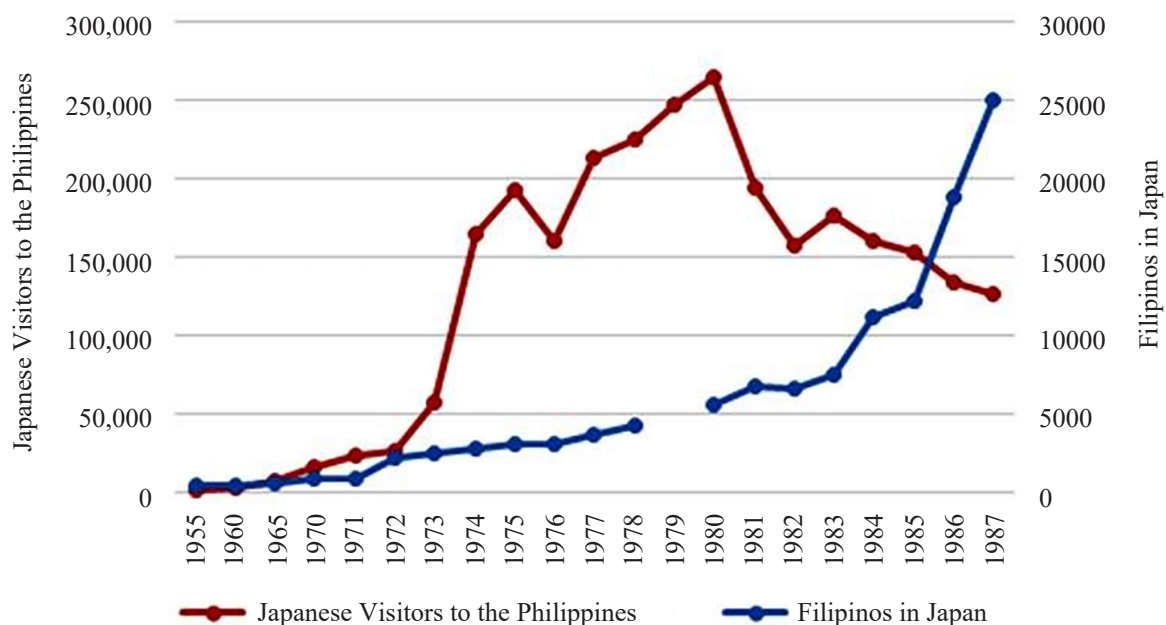


Figure 1: Japanese /Filipino visitor arrivals in the Philippines/Japan (1950s–1980s).

Sources: Statistics Bureau of Japan (various editions) and National Statistical Coordination Board (Philippines, various editions) in Lambino (2015: 12).

THE *JAPAYUKI* PHENOMENON

This systematic importation of Filipino women for the Japanese sex industry ushered in the so-called *Japayuki* era. Various services catering to this unique segment of the labour export program started to emerge—ranging from the proliferation of dance and music studios for training of prospective migrants, to the deployment of “talent scouts” to the provinces to identify suitable recruits. Tyner (1996: 412–413) observed that the entertainment sector of

the labour export business was the most heavily “regulated,” with layer upon layer of regulations relating to procedures for recruitment and deployment. For example, special licenses were required to engage in recruitment of migrant entertainers, with recruits then required to undergo extensive training and testing. However, this elaborate and ostensibly strict regulation of the preparation of migrant entertainers (recruitment, training and assessment of skills lasting 6–12 months) may have served to mask anomalies in their certification and eventual deployment—as I argue further in the subsequent discussion.

One aspect of the system for recruiting *Japayuki* that remains relatively opaque is the largely “industry-managed” scheme of setting up dance and music studios as training centres, regulated in a manner similar to artists’ guilds. This is in part a reflection of longstanding links between professional and college-based cultural dance troupes and the overseas entertainment industry. *Japayuki* entertainers formed part of this wider constellation that encompasses conventional performers whose work involves no sexual dimension, making it hard to determine where certification for *bona fide* musical performers shaded into cover for migrants destined to perform other services. As Faier (2007) notes, “professional Filipino folk dancers worked as trainers, promoters, and examiners for Filipina women going to Japan, and some former cultural dancers used capital acquired through this work to start businesses recruiting Filipina women to work in Japanese bars” (151). Further, many of these select groups of “cultural workers” turned “labour exporters” had strong ties with the Marcoses, having participated in international tours and performances as part of the propaganda machine of the “conjugal dictatorship.”¹² These prestigious socio-political connections helped lend a cloak of legitimacy to the business of exporting Filipino women for what often amounted to sex work.

The conditions of employment awaiting these women in Japan were precarious. The *Japayuki* influx during the 1980s coincided with an intensifying *kaikoku – sakoku* (“open country – closed country”) debate, over whether or not Japan should become a “country of immigration” (Brody 2002). Despite acute demand for cheap foreign labour, especially in the manufacturing and construction industry, the government resisted opening formal routes for migrant labour, instead tacitly sanctioning the use of informal mechanisms (i.e., traineeships) to bring in foreign workers, making foreign recruits highly vulnerable to exploitation. In the entertainment industry, Rijn (2016) argues that there was deliberate failure to enforce penalties against those (often organised criminal gangs) facilitating the entry and (illegal) stay of foreigners for illicit sex work. But from its very inception, the “entertainer visa” scheme

appears to have been designed to camouflage the illicit nature of the services these migrants would perform. Ostensibly admitted for theatrical, musical and other cultural performances, in reality the majority of the holders of such visas were from the outset engaged in “unauthorised work” as bar hostesses, nightclub dancers, strippers and prostitutes.¹³

The insecurity this entailed was exacerbated by the fact that foreigners entering Japan on entertainer visas were (and still are) legally classified not as labourers but as “sojourners,” to whom the domestic labour laws do not apply (Ballescás 1996: 100 in Morooka 2006: 97; Parreñas 2011). As a ranking labour ministry official once testified in a Diet session, entertainers were distinguished from “regular workers” because their work, unlike normal labour, owed a great deal to the display of their artistic talent (Koyama 1992: 332 in Morooka 2006: 97). This further reduced the status of Filipina entertainers in the country, making them doubly “illegitimate”—in the sense that they were workers outside the bounds of the Japanese labour laws, and engaged in work that was in any case technically prohibited under their visa category.

So how did these Filipina entertainers find themselves in this illicit and precarious position in Japan’s labour market? What was the role of the Philippine government in facilitating their migration (or trafficking) to Japan? And how were their “entertainment” abilities developed and certified as “exportable skills”? The following sections attempt to answer these questions through a closer investigation of the development of systems for procuring, training and certifying these women before their departure from the Philippines.

DEPLOYMENT OF FILIPINO MIGRANT ENTERTAINMENT WORKERS

Japan-bound entertainment workers do not feature as a specific category in Philippine registries of overseas workers (Philippine Overseas Employment Administration or POEA, Philippine Statistics Authority or PSA, etc.). Even in the latest (2015) survey by the PSA, this group appears to be covered by category 3 (out of 9), which encompasses: service workers and shop and market sales workers; traders and related workers; and labourers and unskilled workers. The latter subcategory comprises more than one third of the total annual deployment of migrant workers, and almost 55 percent of those who fall within this classification are women (the majority of them domestic helpers). Thus, the studies reviewed in this essay typically rely on Japanese immigration statistics, using the number of “entertainment visas” issued to Filipino migrant

workers as a proxy estimate. The POEA does maintain a separate category for OPAs (“singers, composers, musicians”), but this mysteriously excludes entertainment workers bound for Japan. According to De Dios (2016), the peripheralisation of this migrant workers group is a result of the “categorical conflation of entertainment work with nightclub hostessing and prostitution” (186). Meanwhile, of the roughly 2,000 OPAs deployed annually between 2011 and 2014, some ended up registered as “able seaman” if they perform in cruise ships according to De Dios’ seminal work on Filipino musical performers in cruise ships, theme parks and hotel lounges around Southeast Asia (2015). De Dios further notes that, since entertainers were included in the labour export program in late 1970s, the POEA has issued official statistics on the distribution and destination of OPAs only once (in 2014). These exercises in statistical obfuscation reflect the ambivalence of successive governments towards this sector. This ambivalence also relates to the skills certification mechanism for Japan-bound entertainment workers, discussed further below.

Table 1: Skills certification mechanism for Filipino migrant entertainers.

Inclusive years	Official title of certificate	Policy cover	Oversight agency
1981–1985	Philippine Entertainment Certification Center Card (or the “Blue” Card)	Ministry Order 6, series 1981	Labour and Employment
1985–1994	Artist Accreditation Certificate (AAC or the “White” or “Yellow” Card)	Rules and Regulations Governing Overseas Employment - Book VII Rule VIII - Certification of Entertainers (issued 21 May 1985)	Labour and Employment (and Foreign Affairs)
1994–2004	ARB	Department Order 3, series of 1994	Technical Education Skills Development Authority
2005–	ARB (later revised to Artist Accreditation Certificate)	Department Order 67, series of 2004	Labour and Employment

Like its Japanese counterpart, the Philippine government has persistently adhered to the line that entertainers are “artists” who thereby warrant distinct treatment from other categories of worker. It has therefore facilitated the large-scale migration of Filipino entertainers, not through bilateral agreements with receiving states (dubbed “job orders” in the case of other categories of migrant worker), but by officially certifying entertainers as legitimate performers. Official monitoring of the flow of Filipino entertainers started in the early 1980s with the issuance of the Philippine Entertainment Certification Center

Card, otherwise known as the “blue card” (MO 6 s. 1981). Entertainers had to undergo a performance arts skills assessment (singing or dancing), overseen by a panel of judges drawn from the local entertainment industry. In 1989, this was replaced with the yellow or white card, granting prospective migrant entertainment workers an Artist Accreditation Certificate (AAC). In 1994, a major overhaul of the certification program for entertainers was introduced, bringing them under the category of “professional, technical and related workers.” At the same time, responsibility for assessing entertainers was transferred from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Ministry of Education, under the new ARB scheme (Parreñas 2011:34). A newly created entity, TESDA, would eventually take over this role (see next discussion).

Thus, beginning 1994, under a new “label” (as the ARB) and under the purview of a new agency, the same certification system for migrant entertainers bound for Japan, South Korea and Singapore was retained as a mandatory requirement for the pre-departure processing: from the POEA certification of the employment contract to the issuance of an exit visa for legitimate outmigration from the Philippines (De Dios 2015). As a key component of the system for training, testing and certifying performers, the ARB document was purportedly “designed to upgrade and professionalise the overseas entertainment industry, through the development of skills and careful selection of workers.” This was done through a series of academic and performance skills tests administered by TESDA, the skills certification agency of the POEA. However, as De Dios (2015) notes, the only certification tests issued by TESDA were for Singers and Dancers, two of the most commonly feminised occupations in creative labour (99).

In reality, the tests often served as gateway into *Japayuki* employment for young, unemployed and out-of-school Filipino women—a major target group of the government’s technical-vocational education and job placement programs. In early 2004, a scandal erupted over the sale of ARBs (for as much as P50,000 or 100,000 JPY each), mostly to unqualified and untalented applicants. Lacking genuine musical or other talent, most of these ended up as prostitutes in Japan’s brothels and nightclubs, thereby further undermining the already disadvantaged status of women migrant workers holding “legitimate” entertainer visas. The government responded by restoring responsibility for accreditation of Japan-bound entertainers to the POEA. The ARB was then re-packaged using the old AAC mechanism (implemented back in the early 1980s) but with more stringent requirements. However, after only a year, in 2005, the Japanese government stopped recognising this accreditation program, on the grounds that the flawed system did not credit “real entertainers.”

The Japanese response was conditioned by other factors besides the certification scandal in the Philippines. The unraveling of this certification-for-sale racket coincided with the release of a 2004–2005 *Trafficking in Persons Report* by the United States government, in which Japan was identified as a major culprit due to the large number of foreign women entertainers employed there (US-DOS 2005: 132). In a sweeping and highly problematic manner, the United States report identified the entertainers as sex workers trafficked illegally. Accordingly, Filipina hostesses in Japan were portrayed in the report as the largest group of sex-trafficked persons in the world, making up more than 10 percent of the 800,000 estimated victims of human trafficking worldwide (Parreñas 2011:6). To save face and improve their country’s image abroad, the Japanese authorities decided to crack down on illegal immigrants in the country. First, all Filipino “overstayers,” or those who had entered Japan on a tourist visa and subsequently found employment, were deported. The Japanese government then declared that it would no longer honour the AAC, citing the recent certification scandal. Since the AAC is an official Philippine document, Foreign Affairs officials considered filing a diplomatic protest but decided not to pursue this once they were confronted by mounting evidence from the Japanese side (Parreñas 2011).

From the onset of state-sponsored labour export in 1974, migration bureaucrats in the Philippines had originally handled the certification of outward-bound entertainers. In 1994, this responsibility had been transferred to a newly created technical-vocational education agency—TESDA (see subsequent discussion). However, the ARB scandal was never investigated as an educational issue, but was reported in the media and debated in various congressional hearings purely in relation to labour export policy (cf. Philippine Senate 2005). This involved overlooking the significance of two interlocking factors. One is the pervasive view of technical-vocational education—encompassing training in “entertainment”-related skills—as inferior to “formal” academic degree programs; a view institutionalised in the categorisation of programs overseen by TESDA. The second involves the unforeseen consequences of the 1994 move to establish various “autonomous” education agencies without any national-level institutional mechanism for coordinating or auditing their performance. These factors are further analysed in the following section where a historical timeline of relevant education reforms is analysed, particularly in the area of education governance and its impact on the technical-vocational education system.

EDUCATION REFORMS

This last section analyses two educational reforms initiated during or just after the Marcos years (1987–1994) which have had a direct impact on the export of Filipino entertainment workers. The first part discusses how the expansion of the technical-vocational programs eventually targeted young, unemployed and out-of-school Filipino women—prime candidates for overseas entertainment work. The second part analyses the negative implications of a radical fragmentation of the “national education system” to the integrity of certification systems for overseas entertainment-related qualifications. The drive to streamline and decentralise bureaucratic governance was partly a reaction to decades of centralised political control under Marcos (1965–1986), which resulted in economic stagnation, authoritarianism and corruption. Of the four models of governance decentralisation (Rondinelli and Cheema 1983)—deconcentration, delegation, devolution (and privatisation)—the Philippines adopted mainly the devolution and privatisation models, particularly in the health and education sectors. In education, Hanson (2006) defines three forms of governance decentralisation as follows: (a) *deconcentration*, which involves the transfer of tasks and work, but not authority to other units of the organisation; (b) *delegation*, which involves the qualified transfer of decision-making authority from higher to lower hierarchical units (with the delegating unit reserving the right to withdraw that authority); and (c) *devolution*, defined as the transfer of authority to autonomous units that can act independently, or units that can act without first asking permission. Hallmarks of all three forms of decentralisation can be seen in the contemporary Philippines. But reforms to the administration of the technical-vocational education sector have been characterised above all by “devolution.”

Expanding Technical-vocational Education

In an earlier study (Maca 2018), I analysed the ambitious reforms of the Marcos-era New Society Program, which aimed to address what was widely seen as a worsening mismatch between the needs of the economy and manpower skills. But a more urgent concern for the Marcoses was the lingering unemployment crisis amongst young and educated Filipinos, which represented a potential threat to the political survival of their dictatorial regime. An expanded Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) program was engineered which aimed to quickly train and deploy Filipinos for local employment and, increasingly, for placement overseas. Originally tasked with training and certifying technicians, domestic workers and hotel staff, the TVET sector was

by the 1970s also involved in preparing entertainment workers for overseas employment, particularly in Japan.

The institutional history of the training infrastructure for the entertainment sector can be traced to an extension of the non-formal (i.e., non-school-based) branch of the TVET system initiated in 1966, when the Manpower Development Council (MDC) was created to promote skills training for employment. In 1969, the MDC became the National Manpower and Youth Council (NMYC). This reflected a new emphasis on providing skills and training to youth, especially drop-outs from the “formal” schooling system. The latter included young women who were increasingly seen as ideal candidates for entertainment work abroad. The NMYC later established regional and provincial training centres that were eventually absorbed into TESDA, created in 1994. TESDA’s remit extended to all TVE programmes (i.e., Bureau of Technical and Vocational Education of the Department of Education, NMYC and the apprenticeship programme of the Department of Labour and Employment), and included the management of the ARB scheme for migrant entertainers.

This expansion of TVE witnessed the proliferation of “training centres” for Filipinos who wanted to do overseas entertainment work. These were classified as technical vocational education institutes for “cultural performance,” encompassing the skills notionally expected of Filipinas applying for work as entertainers in Japan: singing, dancing and playing musical instruments. Faier (2009) and Ballescas (2003) trace the historical antecedents of *Japayuki* work back to a more glamorous elite dance tradition in the Philippines that dates to the early 20th century; originally, therefore, such schools were seen as preparing young women for a respectable occupation. But during the 1970s, as the Philippines witnessed an influx of tourists seeking sexual gratification alongside “cultural” entertainment, the image of “performing in Japan” as a respectable occupation was undermined.

From the mid-1970s to 1994, the Ministry/Department of Labour and Employment’s Philippine Overseas Employment Agency performed the validation and certification of prospective migrants’ “entertainment skills.” External examiners composed of “industry veterans” (established musicians and performers) assisted government regulators.¹⁴ But in 1994, as part of the process of decentralisation (or fragmentation) discussed further below, this function was transferred to TESDA under a new tripartite arrangement for managing the education sector. Thereafter, from 1994 to 2004, the business of regulating and accrediting training institutes, and assessing and certifying entertainment skills, was officially under the purview of the government’s TVE agency.

It was also during this period that various anomalies related to the regulation of training and certification of migrant entertainment workers, including the illegal bidding of the ARBs mentioned above, were uncovered. Evidence discussed further below suggests that this is partly the outcome of the lack of centralised oversight and state control over the different sub-sectors of the education system as a result of the “successful” decentralisation reforms initiated under the Marcos regime and expanded by his successors. But understanding the origins of these administrative changes, and their implications, requires critical appreciation of the historical and political context in which such decisions were made.

Decentralisation of Educational Administration

When the education bureaucracy was transferred to Filipino control during the Commonwealth era starting in 1936, the highly-centralised system of policy-making and educational governance established by the Americans was maintained (Calingasan 2016). A national council or board of education (NBE) was vested with functions encompassing all facets of educational planning and administration nationwide. This was composed of representatives from different branches or agencies of the government, the education sector and other sectors, appointed by the President. When Marcos assumed the presidency in 1965, he retained the same structure but reduced the membership of the board. But in 1982, after martial law was lifted, a new Education Act abolished the NBE, signalling the commencement of educational decentralisation. At the time, nationalist critics of the regime alleged that this law had been introduced at the behest of the World Bank (Nationalist Resource Center 1982), and the wider role of the country’s creditors in education reforms introduced during this period is attested in earlier studies (Maca and Morris 2012; Maca 2018). Bautista et al. (2008) highlight how almost a century of “externally-induced” reform programs failed to transform basic education in the country. Meanwhile, decentralisation initiatives in Philippine higher education were continuously being “initiated by Congressional or Presidential commissions” (e.g., Congressional Commission on Education or EDCOM, Presidential Commission on Education Reform or PCER and Presidential Task Force for Education or PTFE) and usually with the collaboration/advice of multi-lateral development agencies, according to Chao (2012: 37).

Initiatives to decentralise educational governance in the country started as “prerequisites”¹⁵ for the implementation of loan-funded programs supported by external creditors, led by the World Bank. At the level of basic education, for

example, the World Bank loan-funded Program for Decentralized Education Development (PRODED), from 1983 to 1989, prescribed more school autonomy and additional decision-making powers for school heads. Earlier loan packages targeting higher education (e.g., engineering and agriculture) and technical-vocational training programs also came with a “decentralised governance” component (Alba 1979).

The process of breaking up what was by then condemned as an excessively monolithic and over-centralised education system was thus initiated during the waning years of the Marcos regime and continued by succeeding Aquino (1986–1992) and Ramos (1992–1998) governments. The process was completed in 1994 when the Department of Education (DepEd), Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and TESDA were separately established, with the heads of each enjoying ministerial rank. This prompted the resignation of then Education Secretary Armand Fabella, who argued for “the need to oversee the various educational levels—elementary, high school and college—as parts of an integrated system,” emphasising that “the regulation of basic education and tertiary education must be linked and coordinated, not delinked and separated from each other” (Landingin 2017: 254). Almost two decades later, Chao (2012: 37) would pointedly argue that “although the tri-focalization of education increased the focus on each sub-sector, little comprehensive effort on planning and developing the entire sector in national, regional, and global macroeconomic requirements has been initiated.” This failure to advance in its developmental role as “sector,” resulted in Japan-bound migrant entertainers getting deprived of their “skills accreditation,” in the light of global human trafficking policing for example, which the Philippine government in general failed to anticipate or adequately address.

The scope and boundaries of the mandate for each new agency were defined through legislative fiat with loosely-worded provisions on “coordinative” functions, responsibility for which was left vague. Succeeding governments after Fidel Ramos (1992–1998), under whom the drive to deregulation and decentralisation accelerated, made no moves to re-establish a national council or board (along the lines of the pre-1982 NBE) to exercise some sort of “policy oversight” over the entire system. Although the short-lived Estrada administration (1998–2001) convened a National Coordinating Council for Education (NCCE) in 2000 (EO 273 s. 2000), this was conceived as “a regular forum for trans-subsectoral consultations on cross-cutting policies and programs for the three education bodies, and thus had a limited remit.” Macapagal-Arroyo (2001–2010) abolished this council in 2007 (EO 632 s. 2007), and appointed a Presidential Assistant on Education to

perform its functions. She later installed a more loosely-organised Presidential Task Force on Education (EO 652 s. 2007). In justifying the abolition of the NCCE, the relevant order (EO 632 s. 2007) stated that “CHED and DepEd vehemently opposed the TESDA chairmanship” of the council. This exposed the deep rifts amongst leading officials with responsibility for education in the aftermath of the TESDA certification scandal involving the *Japayukis*.

Looking back, the 1982 abolition of the NBE thus left a void in the management of the country’s education system that subsequent governments neglected to fill. Two decades later, the 2004–2005 TESDA scandal can be seen in part as a consequence of the weak oversight of the technical-vocational education sector that resulted from this fragmentation of educational administration. This fragmentation and lack of oversight contributed to mounting corruption in the technical-vocational education sector, with TESDA embroiled in numerous scandals (of which that relating to *Japayuki* certification was just one).¹⁶ The division of educational administration amongst three separate bodies each headed by presidential appointees, with no coordinating authority, rendered these bodies effectively the personal fiefdoms of the incumbent minister. In an earlier study (Maca and Morris 2012), I demonstrated how ministers with responsibility for basic education have tended to perform their duties as an exercise in dispensing patronage. This study argues that similar patterns of behaviour, i.e., seemingly arbitrary “reclassification” (more of re-labelling) of migrant entertainers “credentials,” were reinforced as a result of the administrative fragmentation that accompanied the creation of TESDA. The continuing politicisation of the education sector warrants a separate study altogether but various sector-wide assessments since 1994 (cf. PESS 1998; PCER 2000; PTFE 2008) have failed to analyse where the decentralised structure is failing or becoming vulnerable to abuse. The scant literature analysing education decentralisation delves more into individual “sub-sector” analysis (cf. de Guzman 2007 for basic education; Chao 2012 for higher education), with only passing reference to its links to technical-vocational education. Meanwhile, research on systemic corruption in the basic education sector identifies a pattern of “decentralised” corruption (Chua 1999; Reyes 2009) in different areas (i.e., textbook development and procurement) and levels of governance.

Evidently the Philippine education system underwent the “devolution” variant of decentralisation (Hanson 2006), defined earlier as the transfer of authority to autonomous units that can act independently. This perfectly describes the behaviour of TESDA in relation to its decade-long (1994–2004) management of the certification system for Japan-bound Filipino

entertainment workers. Such exercise of autonomy is within the bounds of its own charter (Republic Act 7796) but as has been argued earlier, a more robust accountability mechanism, such as a national council of education, might have provided more effective oversight.

CONCLUSION

This article analyses the relationship between systems for training and certification in the Philippines, and the migration of *Japayuki* entertainers to Japan since the mid-1970s. It locates this phenomenon in the context of the longer history of migration by Filipino performers to Japan. The fact that many Filipino entertainment workers ended up in semi-prostitution can be seen as resulting from a failure of the Filipino qualifications and labour export systems, and a general weakness of the Philippine state's bargaining powers vis-à-vis Japanese interests when it comes to the design of immigration regulations. This latter claim is rather tentative requiring further investigation (but beyond the scope of this study), but to a certain degree is implied in existing literature (cf. Tyner 2003 and Parreñas 2011 research pertaining to Filipina *Japayukis* and Morooka 2006 study on Japan's "foreign guest workers" which also tackles *Japayukis*).

I have argued elsewhere that the resort to labour export as a key plank in the government's developmental strategy is related to the continuing dominance of the Filipino state by a neo-feudal kleptocracy of landholding "caciques" and assorted tycoons which conducts governance as an exercise in patrimony. For this dominant class, labour export has been both a highly profitable enterprise, and a means of diverting or ameliorating social tensions that might otherwise have sparked significant political unrest (cf. Maca 2017, 2018). But while this political context may help explain in general why the ruling elite has effectively transformed the Philippines into a "labour-brokerage state" (Guevarra 2010; Rodriguez 2010), how is it related to the peculiarly *laissez-faire* approach of the Filipino state with regard to the export of female entertainers? As we have seen in this sector, unlike others, the state has relied on the flimsy mechanism of the ARB (or similar certificates) to legitimate the status of "entertainers," rather than engaging in the kinds of bilateral negotiations involved in exporting other categories of worker.

The hands-off approach of the state authorities towards regulation of the migrant worker trade—especially as it related to vulnerable female workers—was reflected in the terms of an ostensibly rigorous program of

welfare protection for Filipino migrant workers introduced in the mid-1990s. This was introduced in the aftermath of high-profile cases of abuse, murder and execution of Filipino migrant workers in Japan, Singapore and the Arab Gulf states. Grandly called the Magna Carta of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs or Republic Act 8042: The Migrant Workers Act and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995), it spells out various social and legal protections that the state will extend to its migrant workers. But still underpinning this legislation is “the notion that the state does not promote overseas employment but simply facilitates the ‘choice’ of Filipinos to work overseas” (Rodriguez 2010: 37).

While further research is needed in this area (using Japanese as well as Filipino sources), it also seems likely that the Philippine government’s pusillanimity on the *Japayuki* issue has reflected the balance of diplomatic and trade relations with Japan—the country’s biggest trading partner and source of developmental aid. In another study (Maca 2018), I showed how accounts of wartime Japanese brutality in curricula and school textbooks have been diluted or sanitised over time, at the same time as the commercial and diplomatic interests of Filipino elites have become increasingly aligned with those of Japan. I have also argued that this transition to more favourable depictions of Japan was facilitated by the absence of a strong anti-colonial narrative—something which Filipino elites, with their collaborationist record, have been keen to avoid. Former colonisers—especially Spain and America, but also Japan—are portrayed in a strikingly favourable light. This can in turn be related to the relatively weakly-held sense of national identity that animates Filipino society. Partly as a result of this, the mass trafficking of women to Japan from the Philippines—a country that within living memory was part of the Japanese military’s “comfort women” system of sex slavery—has aroused little public resentment. To some extent, this applies also to the *Japayukis* themselves and those advocating on their behalf, whose failure to hold the Philippine state accountable for their welfare and protection may be seen as symptomatic of the broader weakness of Filipino national consciousness (Maca and Morris 2015).

Finally, whilst the technical-vocational education system was instrumental in exposing a weak link (certification of exportable skill) in an otherwise “global model” of labour-export state enterprise, evidence from basic and higher education sectors must be analysed.¹⁷ However, evidence analysed in this paper confirms how the skills certification scheme (ARB program) was manipulated for the large-scale deployment of Filipina entertainers, and as a cover-up for corrupt practices of labour (POEA) and education (TESDA) officials. Whilst being under the purview of the

technical-vocational education subsector not only legitimised this racket, it also exploited lingering weaknesses of educational institutions. Nevertheless, this warrants a more systemic investigation contiguous to the long overdue task of assessing the impact of the complete segmentation of the Philippine education system since 1994. Reform programs in the past two decades under this decentralised/segmented system have generated mixed results, with foreign aid donors mostly claiming success in certain areas (e.g., principal empowerment in school-based management). In the end, the many promises of educational change are manifested in a singular hallmark—the unabated expansion of a sophisticated system of training and certifying exportable skills for the global market. Meanwhile, the Filipino state stubbornly adheres to its fictional nationalist narrative: that the foundation of modern Philippines rests upon the shoulders of loyal and patriotic cadre of migrant citizens.

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NOTES

* Mark Maca is an independent scholar and technical advisor in the Philippines Department (Ministry) of Education. He is currently a Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) Ronpaku Fellow at the Department of Education, Kyushu University. He is doing research on education, state formation and the phenomenon of Filipino labour migration. He has previously published on Philippine education and development policy, and national identity formation in history and citizenship education curricula and textbooks.

¹ *Japayuki* is the collective term for migrant women workers trained to be **cultural entertainers** (emphasis added) but often forced into **prostitution** (original emphasis) in Japan (Kintanar 2009).

² On the narratives of other Filipinos working in Japan especially the manual labourer (counterparts of the majority deployed in the Middle East), the three-part semi-autobiographical work of Rey Ventura (1992, 2007, 2014) of his life in Japan as a manual worker (*tachinbo*), a foreigner-husband and son-in-law and the general travails

of studying, working and living in Japan (illegally in earlier periods) is the most readily accessible. Japanese and Filipino scholars have also looked into the Filipino *nissei* children (first generation children with Japanese father and Filipina mother—mostly *Japayuki*).

- ³ They also exhibit a different dimension of the vulnerabilities of land-based overseas entertainment work, of DAWN (2003), as compared to those working aboard cruise ships for example (see De Dios 2015).
- ⁴ See historical analysis on the role of colonial education in early Filipino emigration to the United States (Maca 2017) and labour export as a development strategy under Marcos (Maca 2018).
- ⁵ The Marcos government adopted education decentralisation prescribed in World Bank loan-funded projects implemented.
- ⁶ In 1922, a report in *The New York Times* noted that Filipino orchestras “are the interpreters of jazz on, the Pacific Ocean liners...” The *Times* writer further declared that, “Where music is concerned, the Filipinos are known as the Italians of the East. Add their own barbaric musical strain—a blend of Oriental and Spanish “ear culture”—and you get an idea of their adeptness with the torturous instruments of jazz” (Atkins 2001: 59).
- ⁷ The American military brought in Filipino entertainers for the “rest and recreation” of their own troops when they occupied Japan.
- ⁸ This phenomenon was not unique to the Philippines. In 1982 an estimated one million Japanese tourists visited other Asian countries like Thailand, South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong on tours called “trips for men only” which explicitly included visits to brothels (Thanh-Dam 1983 cited in Morooka 2006: 66).
- ⁹ The country’s sex industry was initially largely confined to Angeles City, Pampanga (Clark Airbase) and Subic, Zambales, where the United States naval facilities were located.
- ¹⁰ The turning point in postwar Philippine-Japanese relations, this treaty opened Philippine doors to massive Japanese trade and investment, making Japan a top-trading partner, foreign investor, and most generous donor of official development assistance to the Philippines (Ballescas 2003: 564).
- ¹¹ During the period 1981–1987, Japanese visitors declined from 193,146 to only 126,825 while the number of Filipino workers deployed to Japan increased from 11,656 to 33,791, 93% or 31,292 of which were female entertainers (Tyner 1996).
- ¹² Although this topic warrants a separate investigation altogether, check the works of Lico (2003), Baluyut (2012) and Espiritu (2017) on how the Marcoses capitalised on culture and the arts to glamourise their dictatorial regime.
- ¹³ Ironically, Japan has been culturally and historically tolerant of the sex industry and licensed prostitution had been practiced until 1946 when the Occupation Forces ordered to abolish the system (Yoneda 1998, cited in Morooka 2006: 66). Japan’s sex industry is also highly lucrative which Ballescas (2003) estimated an annual profit of USD 5 billion, “an amount equal to the entire defense budget of the nation” (569).
- ¹⁴ The POEA website (www.poea.gov.ph) has a repository of memoranda from 1984 to 1994 with the list and composition of these assessment panels.
- ¹⁵ As part of prescribed project “components,” the decentralised approach to education delivery was tantamount to a “conditionality” in loan negotiations and approval.

- ¹⁶ Allegations of massive corruption in the agency were confirmed by a senior staff of a Congressman who was appointed TESDA Director General during the incumbency of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (pers. comm. 10 May 2017).
- ¹⁷ In higher education, an interesting case would be the nursing licensure examination items “leakage” scandal in early 2010s involving members of another “independent” skills certification body—the Professional Regulatory Commission (PRC), and the more recent controversy on the recognition of Filipino seafarers training and “credentials” by European Union authorities, involving another government agency, the Maritime Industry Authority (MARINA). As the largest global supplier of seafarers, EU officials wanted compliance of the Philippines with the STCW convention (International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers) but bureaucratic red tape and allegations of corrupt practices among MARINA officials delayed the audit and approval of Philippine maritime schools by EU maritime authorities.

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