

Chapter 6

Settling for Welfare? Shifting Access to Welfare, Migration and Settlement Aspirations of Filipina Single Mothers in Japan



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6.1 Introduction

Japan provides a compelling case for interrogating the relationship between welfare, migration and citizenship for several reasons. Firstly, its declining fertility rate and rapid ageing bear implications for the budgetary allocation of social provision. These demographic changes, coupled with a stagnating economy, pose a challenge to Japan's capacity to provide for the welfare of its elderly and ensure the overall well-being of its families (Sano and Yasumoto 2014, 319). Second, ageing brings about ambivalence in the life chances of future Japanese citizens, while the rising cost of raising children affects Japan's desirability as a place of permanent settlement for migrant families. Thirdly, as the working-age population declines, Japan must induce the employment of its young and female members (as well as migrants) who will bear the brunt of the welfare system. Such social change may undermine the hard lines of gendered labour. Fourth, the slow but steadily rising number of immigrants raising their Japan-born children – as single mothers or as parents in a mixed family – invokes questions about social citizenship and welfare accessibility.

Building on interviews with and the life narratives of Filipina single mothers in Tokyo, this qualitative study examines how various kinds of social support impact on their migration aspirations and trajectories in and beyond Japan. It does so through analysing their welfare resource environment (Righard 2008), looking into their access to public social protection across the life course in relation to the family provisions available in Japan (and in the Philippines to some extent), the responsibilities commensurate with social benefits and their perceived inclusion in or exclusion from Japanese society. Lastly, the study discusses the extent to which receiving social protection across borders influences the migration and settlement aspirations

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of Filipino immigrants. The remainder of this chapter introduces the context of immigration and welfare support in Japan, discusses theoretical concepts, research methods and data and summarises the findings.

6.2 Immigration and Welfare in Japan

The steadily declining birth rates and rapidly greying population have raised profound questions about the future of work and family life in Japan. Yet Japan remains reluctant to open its borders and support the permanent settlement of immigrants, whose numbers account for 3% of the total population (Ministry of Justice 2019). Japan's restrictive immigration regime has left migrants with relatively few ways of entering the country; these few ways take the form of family migration (by marrying a Japanese national), student migration or migration into the business sector, under all of which pressure the newcomer to assimilate into Japanese cultural practices and norms is high (Liu-Farrer 2014).

In April 2019, the right-wing government under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe resolved to accept thousands of migrant workers in order to address the labour shortages in 11 industries or sectors, including nursing (Rich 2018). This recent immigration decision, however, drew mixed reactions from the public and civil society. With Japan's 'revolving door' disposition towards migrants, the government continues to face the challenge of fully integrating its foreign residents and recognising their broadening social roles (Takao 2003, 552). On the contrary, the general Japanese population holds fairly positive perceptions about immigration. According to the 2018 Global Attitudes Survey, for instance, the majority of Japanese respondents viewed immigrants more as contributing to job skills and the talent pool of the country (59%) than as being a social burden in terms of access to jobs and social benefits (31%) (Stokes and Devlin 2018). The study, however, does not account for whether these attitudes concern only migrant workers or are relevant to permanent foreign residents as well.

Filipinos constitute a group of permanent migrant residents in Japan. The bubble economy of Japan in the 1980s stimulated an increased migration of Filipina migrants (or Filipinas) in response to the growing demand for sexualised and reproductive labour. They are identified as either *hanayome* (brides) to Japanese men in rural areas or *Japayuki* (bound for Japan) entertainers working in Japan's booming nightlife districts. By raising families with Japanese nationals, most Filipina migrants have settled in Japan permanently. Permanent residency is made available to immigrants who have been in Japan for 10 years, while long-term residence is bestowed on migrant women who are granted legal custody over their child with a Japanese father (Ishii 2005; also cited in Celero 2017, 196) who recognises such a decision. The number of Filipinas with a long-term residence permit (on the basis of having Japanese-born children) increased from 37,870 in 2010 to 51,097 in 2018, while the number of permanent residents rose from 92,754 to 128,446 during the same period (Ministry of Justice 2018).

However, not all Japanese-Filipino marriages were successful and not all Filipinas married in Japan. There are one million Japanese and non-Japanese single-headed households (mostly single mothers) in Japan, marking a 50% increase between 1992 and 2016 (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare 2016). As parents to Japanese-born children, some Filipina migrants are eligible for a number of social support programmes. Developed largely after World War II, Japan's social welfare system consists of various monetary, service and other provisions primarily targeting poor and vulnerable members of its population (Furukawa 2008; Komatsubara 2012; Miyamoto 2003). With its limited welfare state, Japan has always under-prioritised its social policy (Holliday 2000). Amid its steadily ageing population, Japan only began to allocate 20% of its GDP for public social spending on elderly care and healthcare in the early 2010s (OECD 2012).

The legal framework for Japan's welfare system is called 'Six Social Welfare Laws' and consists of the Daily Life Protection Law, the Child Welfare Law, the Mother with Dependent and Widow Protection Law, the Welfare Law for the Aged, the Law for the Welfare of Physically Handicapped Persons and the Law for the Welfare of Mentally Disordered Persons (JICA 2009; Koijima 2011). All single parents are entitled to the universal Child Allowance (CA). Single parents who pass income tests can also receive the Child-Rearing Allowance (CRA), which amounts to 41,720 Japanese Yen or JPY (approx. US\$ 380) per child per month and is paid – if the parent's annual income is less than JPY 1.3 million (US\$ 11,900) – until the year in which the child turns 18 years old (Komatsubara 2012). This allowance is paid for partly by the national government and, since 2006, the prefecture and the municipal government (Komatsubara 2012). Factors that shape access to the CRA include the number of children and the age of the parent. While paid together with a much-reduced CA, child support payments are time-bound and can only be used to supplement the family's income (Ezawa and Fujiwara 2005).

The total decline of the fertility rate to a record low of 1.57 in 1989 prompted the Japanese government to shift the goal of social policies from being family-oriented to achieving a work–life balance, further enhancing childcare services (Abe et al. 2003; Ikezoe 2014; Komatsubara 2012). The Angel Plan, among other measures, tripled the number of daycare services and child-minding centres, from about 2000 to 7000 across the country (Boling 1998). Reforms were introduced to the social welfare system in 2000, shifting from administrative to contract-based welfare arrangements, with the national government obliging local government units (cities, towns and villages) to be more involved in welfare planning (JICA 2009). Consequently, daycare centres grew exponentially and gave more options for working mothers although the privately run ones tend to cost more and are of better quality than government-funded types (Abe et al. 2003). By 2015, the number of childcare facilities had increased to 24,234, of which 15,380 were privately and 8854 publicly funded (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare 2015).

In the absence of a male provider, single mothers without their own income can also apply for public assistance, known as the Living Subsidy Allowance (*seikatsu hogo*). The Living Subsidy Allowance (LSA) supports all residents (regardless of gender, nationality and economic status) in meeting and maintaining minimum

standards of living and achieving socio-economic freedom (Aoki and Aoki 2005; Ezawa and Fujiwara 2005; Furukawa 2008). Living subsidy recipients obtain protection from poverty and inequality through securing assistance in eight categories of need: a basic living allowance to cover food, clothing and utilities, housing costs, compulsory education, medical care, elderly care, the cost of giving birth, skills training and funerals (Komatsubara 2012; OECD 2012). In exchange, these recipients are encouraged to work in order to lead a decent and independent life. The number of households on public assistance went up from 1.27 million in 2009 to 1.64 million in 2017, indicating rising incidences of household poverty in the country, with single-parent households of a single mother and her children below 18 years old reaching almost 93,000 (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare 2017).

In the post-World War II period, the living subsidy allowance was available solely to all Japanese citizens in accordance with the Daily Life Protection Law. In 1954, following the local governments' humanitarian decision to give support to foreign residents in need, the scheme began assisting 'special permanent and permanent residents, spouses of permanent foreign residents or Japanese nationals, and those who received refugee status from the government' (Ezawa and Fujiwara 2005). Preferential grants and the allocation of public housing (*danchi*) were likewise extended to low-income or single-parent families.

Despite the Japanese government's efforts to promote inclusivity within the welfare system, the gradual diversification of welfare schemes further reinforced social inequality, disaggregating Japanese citizens and non-citizens and, at the same time, producing hierarchical categories of welfare dependents whose usage is contingent upon their migrant (*vis-à-vis* non-migrant) and socio-economic status. In her study, Celero (2014), for example, explained that Filipino mothers on public welfare formed a group of living-subsidy recipients situated on the lowest rung of Japan's dual social hierarchy. On the first level, citizens and migrants on living-subsidy support are situated below those who are not on welfare and paying taxes and are able to maintain high standards of living. On the second level are migrant groups who access different kinds of welfare support.

6.3 Theoretical Framework

To provide a structured analysis for this study, I used welfare, transnational social protection, the life course and im/mobility as conceptual tools, Carling's aspiration/ability model as the theoretical reference and the life-course model as the basis for my analytical design.

Welfare is understood here as a set of policies, practices and relations that are central to the management of the subject population and their conduct (Clarke 2002, cited in Morgen and Maskovsky 2003, 321). As an extension of governmentality, welfare policies in general are designed to promote equality, social inclusion and well-being (Kotkas and Veitch 2017, cited in Atac and Rosenberger 2018, 3). Access to social welfare is a function of one's citizenship or membership in the nation state.

In other words, social-welfare benefits are entitlements based on a person's social citizenship. Social citizenship, according to Turner (2008) designates a dual process of inclusion that entails the redistribution of resources and exclusion marked by the formation of strong identities based on assumptions about ethnicity, gender and class. People can access social support through specific contributions made to society, such as activities of social reproduction – giving birth – child-rearing and maintaining a household. Capturing the constitutive relationship between welfare systems and human migration, the concept of transnational social protection is useful for describing the ways in which migrants knit together their own and their families' social protection from different sources located across the borders of nation states (Levitt et al. 2018). De Jong and de Valk (2019) likewise recommend paying attention to the welfare systems in the countries of both origin and destination. I argue that migration, along with the change in migrants' socio-economic status, legal status, residency and social networks, affects the welfare arrangements and the degree to which migrants participate in social reproduction and other obligations.

The analytical approach used for these data is that of the life course, giving salience to the intersectionality of life events, time, risk and uncertainty with interaction in the analysis of social and demographic change (Willekens 1999). Emerging from the field of developmental psychology, the life-course approach has gained traction in international migration research, recognising that migrants are embedded in societies and social processes across borders and that migration is integral to people's lives over time (Bailey 2009; De Jong and de Valk 2019; Wingens et al. 2012). By examining the 'continuities, twists, and turns in individual lives' (Hutchison 2018, 8), a life-course approach in research emphasises the social agency of humans navigating systems of opportunities and risks while making life choices and constructing life journeys. In the context of this study, a life-course approach is useful in presenting the major migrant life transitions through which Filipinas seek different social provisions from their changing resource environment in order to better organise their migrant family lives. Building on these life events related to marriage, family formation and employment helps us to understand how the migration and settlement aspirations of Filipina immigrants are influenced by their life experiences, relationships and interactions with both Japanese and Filipino society.

In addition, this study engages with Carling's aspiration/ability model to theoretically explain the inextricable relationship between migrants' access to welfare support and their life-course events, migration and settlement decisions and trajectories. In his aspiration/ability model, Carling (2002) theorises that im/mobility is shaped by at least three conditions: (1) opportunities for legal migration from developing to industrialised nations, (2) labour migration as a fundamental characteristic of developing economies and societies and (3) the increasing number of people leading transnational lives, relations and everyday activities in two or more nations. Despite the emphasis given to involuntary immobility – i.e. aspiring to migrate but unable to do so – and the greater preference of migration over non-migration, the aspiration/ability model acknowledges the dynamic interaction between structure and the social agency of migrants and recognises that such interactions become

more complex over time, resulting in a range of available migration pathways (Carling and Schewel 2018). The present research shows that, whereas some Filipina immigrants are likely to settle in Japan, others plan to return to the Philippines in the future; such aspirations, however, are contingent upon the continuous evaluation of macro- and personal-level factors. At the macro level, they are affected by the restrictive nature of immigration, labour and the welfare policies of the Japanese government as well as the ambivalent acceptance of migrants in Japanese society. On the other hand, individual-based factors such as legal status, residency and social networks variously impact on the socio-economic roles and everyday individual- and family-related activities and bonds that they forge over time in Japan and the Philippines.

This chapter therefore examines how Filipina immigrants' access to and use of social-welfare protection shapes their aspirations to move and settle in Japan and how such decisions are embedded in their life course. It analyses how using a range of welfare services may influence the extent of their commitment to society/societies as members and how these commitments can transform their aspirations and abilities to move across time, between spaces and among immigrants.

6.4 Research Methods and Data

The data are derived from informal and semi-structured interviews with 70 Filipino mothers raising Japanese-Filipino children in Tokyo. I followed their families from 2010 to 2019, through either face-to-face or online communication. The respondents were recruited through the snowball technique and personal networks. The interviews, which lasted 2–3 h depending on the openness of respondents, were aimed at collecting their life narratives by addressing their migration, education and family background and the economic activities and social services received in Japan. The interviews were conducted using a mix of English, Filipino and Japanese languages. In addition, three focus-group discussions with four members each were organised in 2015 and 2016 with Filipinas who are permanent residents in Yokohama and Tokyo. Finally, follow-up interviews were conducted in 2019 in Tokyo and its immediate environs to get updated information about the family and the economic status of 15 respondents and key informants.

Table 6.1 shows the profile of Filipina respondents in this research according to their family background and socio-economic status. Concerning their status upon entry to Japan in relation to education, most of the Filipino interviewees were former entertainers (42), with some college education (41). Their civil statuses also vary, with majority of them being either divorced (33) or married (29) at the time of interview. According to residency status, 54 of my respondents were permanent residents at the time of interview, and 43 of them resided in Japan for more than 20 years.

Table 6.2, meanwhile, shows the family and socio-economic characteristics of Filipinas in my study. As illustrated, there were 41 single parents in my sample. Single parenthood is defined broadly herein as the absence of a male spouse

Table 6.1 Profile of Filipina respondents in Japan

Age group	Education	Status on entry	Visa status	Civil status	Years in Japan
30–39 (11)	High school (5)	Entertainer (42)	Permanent (54)	Divorced (33)	>10 (7)
40–49 (42)	Technical/vocational (3)	Marriage migrant (17)	Long-term resident (14)	Married (29)	11–20 (20)
50–59 (16)	Some college (41)	Student (5)	Japanese citizen (2)	Unmarried (5)	21+ (43)
60+ (1)	College graduate (21)	Other: Lay missionary (2) Professional (1) Tourist (1)	N.A.	Widow (3)	N.A.

Table 6.2 Family and socio-economic profile of Filipina respondents

Description	Number
<i>Structure</i>	
1. Dual parent	29
2. Single parent	41
<i>Composition</i>	
1. Japanese father, Filipino mother, Japanese-Filipino child	20
2. Japanese father, Filipino mother, left-behind child/adopted child from the Philippines, Japanese-Filipino child	4
3. Filipino mother, Japanese-Filipino child	25
4. Filipino mother, left-behind child in the Philippines, Japanese-Filipino child	10
5. Japanese father (remarried), Filipino mother, Japanese stepchildren, Japanese-Filipino child	4
6. Japanese father, Filipino mother (remarried), Japanese-Filipino child	4
7. Filipino mother, Filipino husband, Japanese-Filipino child	2
8. Filipino mother, foreigner husband, left-behind child/adopted child from the Philippines, Japanese-Filipino child	1
<i>Economic status/livelihood</i>	
1. Full-time job (parent, child, both)	17
2. Part-time job (parent, child, both)	20
3. Business	12
4. (Previously/currently) on living subsidy allowance	10
5. On child-rearing allowance	19
6. On child allowance	22
7. Owns government housing	8

supporting the household. The composition of their family is diverse owing to social factors such as divorce, the lack of a marriage, re-marriage, the death of and/or separation from a Japanese spouse and the re-unification with or separation from one's children. Consequently, their socio-economic status forms a spectrum of socio-economic activities in relation to the Japanese labour market and business and welfare service sectors.

At the time of interview, 17 respondents were employed full-time, while 20 were engaged in part-time jobs in factories, homes for the elderly, laundries, hotels and other service-related companies. Twelve of the women interviewed owned their own business, such as an ethnic store, restaurant, bar and beauty salon. From business-owners to welfare-dependents (Higuchi 2011; Tenegra 2004), the varying socio-economic roles of the Filipino migrants are intimately tied to the life transitions that they go through while leading a migrant family in Japan. The following section elaborates on this relationship.

6.5 Filipina Mothers' Transnational Social Protection

While their welfare environment consists mostly of state, third-sector and personal sources, the Japanese government provides the largest proportion of support for many of the Filipinas in my study. Notwithstanding, the role of migrant support organisations as cultural, language and legal brokers is vital to the Filipina migrants' ability to access the wide range of family and childcare services that the Japanese government provides. At the same time, some Filipina respondents outsourced information, economic resources and care to their personal networks and extended family in the Philippines in order to reconfigure their family life in Japan.

This section takes a life-course approach (De Jong and de Valk 2019) to presenting the link between welfare arrangements and Filipino mothers' major life-course events such as divorce, single parenthood and employment. It investigates the relationship between structural factors such as immigration, labour and welfare regimes that determine the barriers to and opportunities for social support, host-society attitudes towards migrants and individual factors such as legal status, residency and social networks as resources for activating social agency. I centre my analysis on three major transitions that influenced the lives of my informants in Japan: from marriage to divorce, from a nuclear to a single-parent family and from part- to full-time employment and home-ownership. During the interviews, the living subsidy, child benefit, child-rearing allowance and government housing were identified as major forms of social protection received from the Japanese government, services which were combined with private arrangements with the families in the Philippines.

6.5.1 *Marriage to Divorce*

Experiences of physical abuse, marital dispute and separation often led to divorce, based on the life stories of 33 of the 70 informants in this study. In terms of their residency status in the country, these divorced women were initially living in Japan either on a spouse visa or on a permanent resident permit due to marriage. Having a Japan-born child allowed the divorced Filipina mothers to secure the long-term residency necessary for remaining and raising their child in Japan. Prior to

getting divorced, some respondents stated that they knew nothing about the social-welfare system of Japan due to the language barrier. Since most mothers rely on their husband and in-laws to access information and support (Ito 2005), divorce often meant a severe economic loss. As a result, many of them, such as 43-year-old Lydia (on the living-subsidy allowance) relied largely on Filipino migrant support organisations for assistance in securing government support.

When I divorced my husband, I sought the assistance of an NGO who helped me to look for a lawyer because I needed to acquire full child custody rights. Without their assistance, it would have been hard to fight in court because my Japanese language ability was limited then.

Many of my respondent acquired their first public-assistance support after divorce or separation from their Japanese spouse. Some of them also benefitted from the information and emotional support of their migrant friends. The period in which they relied on the living allowance was determined by factors such the age of their children, the state of their health, their residency status and the size of the family. Lia came to Japan as an entertainer in 1991. Before her third contract expired in 1993, she had decided to marry her Japanese boyfriend whom she had met at work. When she gave birth in 1996 to their son, however, they began to have marital problems. Her husband became abusive and rarely helped to take care of their baby. On the advice of her close friend in Tokyo, she planned her escape in 1998, memorising the right trains and buses departing from her town and heading to Tokyo. On arriving safely in Tokyo, her friends helped her to file for divorce and apply for the living-subsidy allowance. Except for clothes, she had nothing to declare at the office when undergoing means tests to prove her eligibility. After a few weeks, her caseworker found an apartment for her where she and her child could start family life anew. She also found a job at the lunchbox factory where her friend worked.

Unlike Lia, who secured permanent resident status prior to separating from her spouse, other Filipina respondents in this study once had an undocumented status which could have hindered their access to welfare support and trigger return migration to the Philippines. Through the assistance of an NGO in central Tokyo, Nerisa obtained a long-term residence permit and consequently living-subsidy support in 2010, a week after her partner's sudden death. Unable to read Japanese and with a 5-year-old daughter to raise alone, she described this event as the darkest phase in her life. She had to file for long-term residency in order to stay in Japan, fearing deportation and eventual separation from her Japan-born child. The NGO provided her with language and legal support to fill out all the necessary documents prior to undergoing means tests. Depending on the Living Subsidy Allowance or LSA, she had to take care of her child full-time. Receiving JPY 170,000 (US\$ 1500) a month would have been enough to raise her only child but with an aging mother and a child left behind in Manila, she had to endure sending them JPY 30,000 (US\$ 278) for 2 years. Unable to access daycare, she had to wait for her child to reach primary-school age before she could return to work and increase the remittances.

While the LSA has enabled Filipina recipients to head up a nuclear household following divorce, family separation or the death of a partner, the stigmas attached

to this welfare benefit have made them aware of its temporary nature. People receiving the LSA are stigmatised because this denotes helplessness and dependence in life and is often regarded as ‘stealing’ taxpayers’ money. In addition, most recipients are attributed a negative reputation for violating its terms through sending remittances and returning to the home country, leading an undesirable lifestyle or being reticent about finding a job despite their good physical health (Celero 2014). Being aware of the negative public discourse surrounding LSA and the persistent need to support Filipino kin, some respondents sought other welfare services such as public housing and day-care services in order to resume employment.

6.5.2 *From a Nuclear to a Single-Parent Family*

Changes in family composition caused by divorce affect Filipina’s capacity to rear their children. When they become divorced and single parents, only a few mothers strive to raise a child on their own in Japan because it entails huge costs. Thus, only 25 of the Filipinas interviewed could afford to live as a mother-and-child household in Tokyo in the 1990s. Some had to leave their infant in the Philippines, while others had to deal with physical separation until their child reaches school age in order to overcome the burden of childcare. Access to social support and jobs was secured through the assistance of local ward offices, migrant support organisations, social networks or a combination of these agents, depending on the level of Japanese language ability and their years of residence in Japan.

Having two sons to raise, Yolly (50, on child-rearing allowance) thought she did not need to get either of the two types of child allowance. A survivor of domestic violence, she took her children away from her philandering husband despite having a stable life with him. After running away, she sought the aid of their municipal ward office, which then assisted her in filing for divorce and seeking alimony as well as child support from the ex-husband. She realised a few things:

My ex-husband was really smart; he pledged to give child support to our kids on the condition that I divorce him. I should not have relied on his promise... He did not pay for spousal support and only pledged partial support for our kids... he would only support their education. It’s a good thing that the municipal office told me I could get child allowance for my two kids. I receive a small amount every three months but for me it is enough. I believe my kids are my responsibility now and I have to work to give them better lives. I do not need to entrust their future to others. I must prove to my husband that I can make it without him.

Yolly represents those Filipinas in this study who may have benefitted from the CRA but only on a temporary basis and with a limited amount. At the time of the interview in 2011, she was working as a lending investor. Other recipients of the CRA in my study worked full- or part-time. Ezawa and Fujiwara (2005, 51) observe that, since child allowance is not a substitute wages, the government encourages mothers to seek paid jobs by placing their children in public day-care.

A second-generation Filipina born in Japan, Susan was only 19 years old when she gave birth to Yuki. She chose to move to an apartment in Sagami-hara City in

south Tokyo, where day-care is more affordable. The city also provides financial assistance and resource materials on childcare to foreign residents (e.g. the Child Raising Handbook). Susan was able to pay JPY 23,000 (US\$ 211) every month for day-care from her salary as part-time food shop staff. As a high-school graduate, her job options in Japan are limited. Co-residing with Dina, her mother, who had been living in Japan for 7 years before she was born, Susan manages childcare duties. They take turns in caring for Yuki; Susan tends her son while Dina is at work during the day. From early evening on, Dina takes charge of her grandchild while Susan goes to work in the shop.

Even married Filipinas mothers who are unable to access day-care due to its limited availability seek help from their Filipina neighbours, who can babysit for a small fee. Mothers like Nancy, aged 41 and on living-subsidy allowance, lent a hand to her Filipino neighbour while the latter worked at night. Nancy explains why she helps her friend:

My friend did not know it would take time for her son to get accepted for day-care and she has found work. When she asked me to look after her son, I could not say no to her because she is a Filipina, and we used to work together at the bar in the past. Yuta gets on with my Toshimi. Besides, I love taking care of kids.

Thus, a short-term, pseudo- or fictive kin system based on close friendship ties (Ebaugh and Curry 2000, 189) is vital when migrant women cope with shortages in childcare facilities and services across Japan. Most Filipino respondents relying on the LSA also applied for public housing to further reduce their financial burden. While waiting for the housing support, some mothers resolved the problem by sending their children to the Philippines where their natal family performs child-rearing tasks in exchange for remittances.

6.5.3 From Part-Time to Full-Time Employment and Home-Ownership

The economic status of the Filipina immigrants in this study has shifted over the last four decades from that of entertainers to workers in the manufacturing, service, education and health-care sectors. In my own sample, 17 women have become full-time caregivers and assistant language teachers, 12 have endeavoured to run an ethnic store or a beauty salon, to buy and sell businesses or set up a home-based English language school, while 20 have remained part-time workers in factories, hotels and shops. The attainment of a secure economic position signals financial autonomy among Filipinas after years of living in Japan.

Contributing to this status, according to single-parent Filipinas, is the convenience of owning a house in a city with a high cost of living like Tokyo. Public housing units are given to deserving applicants through a lottery. Lea and Cristy were former entertainers who had their names drawn in their respective ward offices

in a bid to acquire a public housing unit. Lea, 40, recalls below how she became a public housing (*danchi*) owner in 2004:

It took me seven years, though, to get a *danchi*. My friend encouraged me to keep following it up. Getting a house was life-changing for my son and me. Before, when I was still an entertainer, I had to send him frequently to the Philippines because I could not take care of him here. When I finally got this house, I was released from getting *seikatsu hogo* (LSA) and I now work in the daytime. I am happy about working for a company now and no longer being fed by the government. I have a better status than those who are on *seikatsu hogo*. I am proud... You know why? Most people think it is tough to get a house from the government... I can now attend to Yuji's schooling. I think it is my responsibility to guide my son...

As Hirayama and Ronald (2007, 23) emphasise, owning a house in Japan, regardless of whether or not it is gained through government assistance, brings a feeling of middle-classness among the Japanese. Similarly, Filipinas in this study emphasised the advantages of owning an actual house in Japan, which includes paying a low monthly rent and being able to manage family and work duties. Cristy (38, on LSA) said the following:

This [house] is truly a blessing and it gives me a sense of dignity. I am a domestic violence survivor and this house has helped me to regain my self-esteem. I now have a decent means of supporting my children; I don't need a husband.

Both Lea and Cristy recognised how their lives have changed over time from being an entertainer, to a welfare support dependent and to a home-owner and full-time employee. They have achieved a better socio-economic status compared to those stuck on LSA. Since 1998, Japan has introduced employment reforms such as flexible working hours, care leave and options to switch to part-time employment (Peng 2011). As a result, some Filipinas have been able to fulfil parental duties while doing a day job, reducing the likelihood of having to leave their children in the Philippines. Some Filipinas can afford to invite their mothers and siblings (typically sisters) over to Japan to assist with childcare, especially immediately after the birth. Those who cannot do so often opt to send their children to the Philippines for longer periods to save on childcare costs. Government housing enables some single mothers, however, to cope with the family and the difficulty of achieving a work-life balance in Japan.

Acquiring public housing also allowed the majority of my respondents to quit night work and secure a day job – a turning point in their socio-economic lives. Engaging in paid work has enabled them to be in control of their family life since they only get minimal assistance through child allowance. Transitioning to full-time day jobs, along with securing long-term and permanent residency, is a marker of membership in Japanese society.

6.6 To Settle or to Return? The Impact of Social Welfare on Filipinas' Migration and Settlement Aspirations

Increasing numbers of Filipinas have become long-term and permanent residents in Japan recently; obtaining this residential status is a prerequisite for, rather than a consequence of, access to social protection. As Japan's welfare system primarily targets families, Filipina single parents sought the requirements to qualify as social citizens in need of protection. They secured paternal recognition to legally stay and raise a child born out of wedlock in Japan, without which they may face deportation and separation from their Japanese child. They also gathered the necessary information and legal documents to qualify for welfare support in return for fulfilling their social obligations, such as giving birth to, rearing and socialising future Japanese citizens (Celero 2014, 2017). If they construct generally positive views about receiving welfare services as well as towards the Japanese government, why do some Filipinas aspire for a more transnational life trajectory?

Most Filipinas in my research seemed to strongly prefer *denizenship* – i.e. permanent residence with a wide band of social and civil rights – to naturalisation, seeing the former as a flexible and utilitarian choice because it promotes legal mobility, an option they share with Korean and Chinese immigrants (Liu-Farrer 2014). In their respective studies, both Liu-Farrer (2014) and Lee (2005) have observed this is common trend among immigrants in Japan who have achieved a socio-economic status over the years through gainful employment and transnational business, while naturalisation has been revealed as a legal strategy of many less-educated immigrants. In my own sample, Filipinas who have successfully graduated from the temporary phase of social welfare reliance, together with those who have thankfully never known poverty, are not keen on switching to Japanese citizenship and find it convenient to be a permanent resident, like Melissa, 50, who is in receipt of the child allowance:

I think I am a Filipino citizen for convenience only. But it is also tough to switch to Japanese citizenship because I already inquired about it before... I got lazy because you must declare everything, every single property you have, even your jewellery, your bags, expenses... it was quite troublesome for me to do. But if it were easy like in the US.... Currently, I hold a permanent residence visa... since I have not had any problems with visa processing and all. I do not see the importance of becoming a Japanese citizen.

Some Filipinas doubt other Filipinas' intention to change their citizenship as requisite to seeking inclusion of their family through sharing citizenship with their Japan-born children. Others allude to ethno-nationalist sentiments when asked about their changing citizenship. They affirm their homeland affinity and belonging to the Philippines despite decades of living in Japan, as 52-year-old Sara (on child allowance) recognises:

I have friends who have already changed their citizenship because they are concerned about travelling abroad but, for me, changing citizenship is more than that. I cannot imagine myself not respecting our [Filipino] flag any more. I do not think that there is a problem with me staying here in Japan as a Filipina. My husband accepted me as a Filipina.

As the narratives suggest, Filipinas' preference for permanent residency fulfils their strategic intent to manage a transnational family and affirms their strong sense of ethnic and national belonging to the Philippines. Permanent residency is a more pragmatic choice through which to negotiate the problem, for single mothers with young children to raise, of settling in Japan and eventually returning to the Philippines; this return is characterised by conditions that revolve around the age of their children: 'When the children are grown-ups', 'When I find a babysitter', 'When I obtain permanent residence' and 'When I secure public housing'. The younger a person's child, the more likely they are to depend on social support and to opt to stay on in Japan. The more inaccessible the childcare support in Japan, however, the more likely they are to outsource childcare in the Philippines in order to reorganise their economic situation in Japan. Access to a broad range of social welfare is less of an influence on their decision to settle than being socio-economically independent, even though they acknowledge its importance in overcoming several family life contingencies, particularly in dealing with the absence of a spouse, as well as the requirements and challenges of raising children in a foreign land.

Another condition that intensifies the im/mobility dilemma is associated with migrants' retirement plans. Most of my respondents in this study are now in their mid-40s to early 60s, indicating that Filipina immigrants in Japan are also becoming older. This demographic trait suggests the changing health status and economic activities in which they could engage in Japan. Those contemplating the timing of their return to the Philippines made mention of their savings as a 'fallback' solution in case they fail to overcome their reliance on social services in Japan. Such a consideration reflects the transnational status paradox (Nieswand 2011) as an outcome of socio-economic inequality between Japan and the Philippines and Kabeer's (2007) observation of female migrant workers from South-East Asia. Filipinas may simultaneously experience downward mobility due to their dependence on family-related welfare provision in Japan and upward social mobility thanks to the remittances and care arrangements that they managed to pull together for their children and families who stayed behind in the Philippines. Other ageing Filipinas who have not managed to build up some savings back home may choose to settle in Japan because there are no clear prospects for their return, as Lia, 50 and on LSA, says here:

I do hope that they [the Japanese government] will not send me home because I am getting support. I can be anywhere. Here or there will do... it is either here or there. I never expected that I would last this long in Japan but, as the years go by... like last year I fell ill, I had an operation. I had to [get medical support]. But so far, the kids are here, I live in government housing... I am okay with permanent residency, so I am here for now.

As Ong's (n.d.) study with ageing Filipinas suggests, getting older presents a new struggle for Filipina immigrants, who need to create positive subjectivity by continuously working in Japan to alleviate fears about becoming a burden on its ageing society while securing an acceptable standard of life for themselves and families in Japan and the Philippines.

6.7 Conclusions

This paper has explained the links between the welfare access, migration and settlement of Filipino immigrants in Japan. It has discussed the range of welfare arrangements that they are able to access in the host country and the support which they seek from their birth families in the Philippines in order to organise their family and work lives through time and across borders.

Filipina immigrants constitute a group of mothers who have relied on a broad range of social protection over their life course. The most vulnerable phases of their migrant lives include divorce, single parenthood and struggles finding full-time employment. As they go through each of these life stages, Filipinas transition from being completely dependent upon the LSA to combining the child-rearing allowance, day-care services and public housing. Acquiring a public housing unit, landing a day job and managing both work and family life signifies social membership, owing to the greater degree of socio-economic freedom to maintain a transnational household which being a breadwinner and a caring parent at the same time gives them (Williams 1995). An integral aspect of the ongoing improvement in their socio-economic status and image in Japan is their collective and individual desire to break away completely from welfare support.

While they recognise its significance in helping them through episodes of contingency and hardship in family life, Filipinas are not conveniently 'magnetised' by welfare, so much so that they will choose not to exchange their ethnic or national membership in order to obtain it. Having lived and worked for decades, they have attained permanent residency in Japan as a utilitarian choice popular among immigrant Filipinas who wish to keep their options for the future open. Filipino single mothers' aspirations to return to the Philippines in the future or settle in Japan are contingent upon the age of their children, their savings and their dreams of a desirable retirement.

Whereas there is a hierarchy among Filipino migrant mothers on welfare, the various forms of support which they receive represent their continuing efforts to attain socio-economic autonomy both in Japan and in the Philippines. As Filipino women move from one form of welfare assistance to another, they attempt to demarginalise themselves from the generally negative perception of them by Japanese society and to negotiate structural inequalities that render them vulnerable in certain life-course events owing to their being Filipina, a divorcee, a single parent and a low-skilled, part-time worker. As demographic and economic pressures loom large, it becomes imperative for Japan to rely extensively on its migrant, female and elderly populations. To govern its social citizens in the future, the state must guarantee that social protection adequately addresses shifting family forms and realities. Contributing towards overcoming these complex challenges will enable Filipina immigrants to further extend their life projects as moralised, transnational Filipinas.

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