

Doctoral Dissertation

**Possibilities and Constraints of Flexible Citizenship in the Era of  
Neoliberal Globalization: A Case Study of Japanese-Filipinos  
(Summary)**

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The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the concept of flexible citizenship (Ong, 1999) in the lives and experiences of Japanese-Filipinos living both in the Philippines and Japan. Essentially, it explores varied forms of subjectification by different institutional-structural factors of the states, NGO, educational institutions and the family. It then reveals the varied strategies of Japanese-Filipinos in navigating the different, sometimes contradicting, effects of such subjectifications. Using narratives and life history approach, this research suggests that subjective experiences of Japanese-Filipinos, that can be observed in the everyday life practices, interactions with peers and family members, and strategies they employed in their transnational setting, can be understood when properly situated in the neoliberal conditions, in which flexible mobility, accumulation of competitive skills and flexible career shifts are lauded.

As a theoretical contribution of flexible citizenship, this dissertation essentially reveals the different forms of institutional-structural factors that governed Japanese-Filipinos in their pursuit for flexible citizenship; namely, the State (Nationality Laws and the Japan-Philippine Economic Partnership Agreement (JPEPA)), Family and Peers, NGO and Educational Institutions. Significantly, this research finds that educational institutions as an institutional-structural factor fundamentally play a key role in the subjectification of Japanese-Filipinos whereby educational institutions have made *multicultural* subjects become competitive individuals in the era of neoliberal globalization. Particularly, they

create various forms of transnational imaginaries that incited migration- a key to flexible citizenship according to Ong. Such subjectification is accommodated by Japanese-Filipinos and their parents to pursue personal interests while at the same time, navigating themselves around the undesirable effects of subjectification particularly in their self-image and future employment. Those who were born and raised in Japan especially feel that the multicultural identity promoted by the educational institutions do not necessarily represent them. Furthermore, as Japanese-Filipinos found jobs in relation to their college degrees they received from the educational institutions, they experienced the non-utilization of their Japanese language skill or the downward mobility in terms of their professional skills. Another finding of this dissertation is the assertion of their filial relationship. In this case, the relationship between the parents and Japanese-Filipinos can either incite the possibilities of pursuing flexible citizenship or create the constraints on such pursuit.

Chapter 1 situates the background of this research. Chapter 2 looks into the states' regulations and the agency of the Japanese-Filipinos to navigate under the effects of these regulations. Due to the differing conditions of the Nationality Laws of the Philippines and Japan, Japanese-Filipinos possess various socio-economic and legal characteristics such as possession of their passports. As a result of the rigid conditions of the nationality law of Japan for children born between Japanese and foreign nationals, Japanese-Filipinos tended to navigate within varied official routes that allow them to operate between the two societies

such as obtaining working visa through the JPEPA or by securing residency status in Japan while still holding their Philippine passports when Japanese citizenship was not obtained. Because the state's regulation of Japan can be found to be contradicting in limiting those who can be called Japanese but is more accommodating in accepting skilled immigrants who are viewed as desirable human capital, Japanese-Filipinos navigate their self-image- from potential Japanese citizen to skilled worker- to circumvent around the stringent regulations such as by delaying their acquisition of Japanese citizenship, securing residency status or migrating to third countries.

Chapter 3 analyzes the representation of Japanese-Filipino Children (JFC) in the Philippines by NGO and the contestation of stories. Through closely examining the disciplinary aspect of the NGO working for the welfare of JFC, this dissertation argues the importance of focusing on the Japanese-Filipinos whose life trajectories and experiences are so heterogeneous that they do not conform to the stereotypical projection of the NGO. The unique way of presenting the typical story of JFC through the organized theater performance tended to be contested by Japanese-Filipinos who are not members of the NGO. Moreover, Japanese-Filipinos tend to have varied opinions in terms of the labels attached to them despite the fact that they similarly question the representation of NGOs based in the Philippines. In doing so, this dissertation suggested the heterogeneous nature of Japanese-Filipinos identification and strategy-making within their transnational setting.

Chapter 4 reveals that educational institutions play significant roles in enabling Japanese-Filipinos embody flexible citizenship through the language and professional skills training provided in their curriculum. The case of MIC and PNJKIS in this study, as emerging educational institutions, is remarkably unique because of its potentiality and exclusivity in producing human capital that gears toward Japan. As revealed in this research, such factor is necessary in pursuing flexible citizenship specially by the Japanese-Filipinos. Through the availability of their resources and influences of decision-making by their families, Japanese-Filipinos in this research tended to utilize the platforms of educational institutions to pursue personal interests. On the other hand, educational institutions provided transnational practices and spaces to its students by promoting its multicultural identity. These practices include Japanese lessons, cultural classes and exchange programs. Transnational spaces are materialized through their school clubs that teach Japanese culture and school rules such as usage of Filipino, English and Japanese languages inside their campus. These transnational spaces enabled Japanese-Filipinos, who are born and raised either in the Philippines and Japan, to acquire their secondary identities that are crucial for their pursuit of flexible status and citizenship. Nevertheless, the expected skills that are assumed to be valuable in their employment are found to be eventually ineffectual due to the flexibility of demands in the global labor market or due to their lower status in the hierarchical social order in Japan. In other cases, despite their successful acquisition of

Japanese passports, their college degrees cannot be utilized when they moved to Japan. Strategies in coping with the negative effects of non-utilization of their professional skills, instilled by educational institutions, included quitting their jobs despite passing the rigid national caregiving examination; settling with their position despite the non-utilization of their language skill, or simply maintaining stable lives either in Japan or the Philippines.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 discusses the function of the family in facilitating possibilities and creating constraints on their pursuit for flexible citizenship. Apart from their flexible mobility, constraints are felt within their subjective experiences such as adjusting to work, inconvenience of professional status, and encounters with intimate contingencies such as untimely pregnancy and their family relations. The limitations of their flexible practices are intensified as the demands of the global market continuously change or their priorities are changed such as taking care of the child instead of working fulltime, being part-time workers in Japan despite having bachelor's degree in the Philippines, or simply by going back to the Philippines. Japanese-Filipinos who were born and raised in Japan oftentimes are sent to the Philippines to receive their education. For those who have soured relationships with parents, the parents often utilize their flexibility to extend parenting resources. As soon as they came back to Japan, Japanese-Filipinos often recalled their experiences in the Philippines and highly regard their developed language and professional skills in their present employment. Japanese-Filipinos tended to choose a kind of profession that allow them to operate with

their Filipino counterparts or foreigners in general because of the language skills they obtained while in the Philippines. It can also be observed that within their intimate relationships, their quest to the Philippines enabled them to find their Filipino life partners. Romantic relationships, subjective in manner, revealed in this research are significant factor that give patterns to their future decision making such as retiring in the Philippines despite having been born and raised in Japan.

This research concludes that flexible citizenship as a framework is pivotal in exploring the navigation practices of Japanese-Filipinos in the era of intensifying neoliberal globalization. Flexible citizenship proved to be an essential analytical tool in understanding the explorations and subjectivity of Japanese-Filipinos specially in navigating their (im)mobility across transnational setting through which the neoliberal values of flexible mobility, individual freedom, and self-enterprising are highly valued. The analysis of comparative experiences by Japanese-Filipinos who are born and raised in the Philippines and those who are born and raised in Japan are worth noting in this research as it enabled a better understanding of their heterogeneous experiences. Yet, somehow these experiences are converging such as skills accumulation practices in educational institutions, their employment in Japan and future aspirations in the Philippines.