



## Korean immigrants in the Philippines

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### Abstract

*The wave of Koreans immigrating to the Philippines before and during the 21st century is a strange immigration phenomenon that leads to many unanswered questions.*

*This article initially approaches the following issues: 1. The difference in people from the Korean peninsula in the past and nowadays Koreans coming to the Philippines; 2. Find out the reason for this phenomenon 3. Research the main characteristics of the Korean community in the Philippines.*

**Keywords:** Settlers - Korea - Philippines - reasons – characteristics

### 1. Introduction

In recent decades, migration from one country to another has become increasingly popular. Korea is also in the general trend of the world. Although the migration of Koreans to other countries and continents has taken place enthusiastically in recent decades, the migration of Koreans has not begun recently.

Koreans residing in the Philippines include those from South Korea and those born in the Philippines of Korean ancestry, forming the second largest expatriate community in Southeast Asia and the 14th largest in the world, only fewer than the number of Koreans in Kazakhstan and more than the number of Koreans in Vietnam. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs- Republic of Korea conducts an investigation into the situation of Koreans living abroad every 2 years. According to the statistics from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as of 2019, the total number of Koreans residing in the Philippines is 85,125 people. Among them, 22 Koreans have taken Philippine citizenship, 1,367 are long-term residents, 7,281 are international students and the remaining 76,455 are permanent residents [5]

### 2. Theoretical basis

Korean migration to the Philippines is not a recent phenomenon. According to Kutsumi (2007), Koreans have settled in the

Philippines since the eighth century because the trade exchange of the Korean peninsula with the Philippines in particular and the countries in Southeast Asia in general has expanded. However, trade was not always the reason why they settled in the Philippines.

During World War II, a number of Koreans went to the Philippines as members of the Imperial Japanese Army. The officer who commanded all Japanese prison camps in the Philippines was actually a Korean – Lieutenant General Hong Sa-Ik (Varangis, 2016).

Some scholars identify sociocultural factors as reasons why Koreans migrated to the Philippines. For example, Kim (1979) said that Koreans had a sense of belonging towards Filipinos. On the other hand, Blanca (2013) claims that there are Koreans who consider themselves assimilated into Philippine society. Igno & Cenidoza (2016) argue that Koreans come to the Philippines due to their cultural popularity among Filipinos. They say that Filipinos really like Hallyu or Korean pop culture because there are so many similarities between Filipinos and Koreans. The people of both countries are hospitable, polite, sociable, sentimental and romantic. The two countries have similarities in their colonial past. Because of these similarities, they conclude that Hallyu is not just a short-term trend but a phenomenon that can be observed in the Philippines in the coming years.

Meanwhile, Koreans have settled in Metro Manila, Tarlac, Baguio, Dumaguete, and Cebu (Miralao, 2007), as well as in the Bataan cities of Orion and Limay (Sadia & Salvador, 2014) due to economic opportunities. business, English education and entertainment. According to Sangil (2015), in the area along the US-Philippines Friendship Highway in Angeles City, there are about 15,000 Koreans residing for two main reasons: one is near Clark International Airport; second, because there is a favorable business environment here.

### 3. Research methods

*Interdisciplinary research methods:* The issue of researching migration is not simply the movement of an individual or group of people from one place to another, from one geographical area to another but also the exchange and acculturation between indigenous groups and immigrant groups. Based on the characteristics of the research issues, it is recognized that the use of interdisciplinary research methods, based on the combined knowledge of the specialties to stand on an objective stance, provides comprehensive and objective research results.

### 4. Research results

#### 4.1. History of Korean settlement in the Philippines

*The history of Korean settlement in the Philippines can be divided into five periods.*

*The first phase, which lasted until just before World War II, included only a few individuals not connected to the old country. Jang Bogo is said to have visited the Philippines in the early 8th century (Business Mirror.2021). Around 1572-1636, a Korean noblewoman, Doña Maria Park, lived in the Philippines as a Catholic nun serving alongside other exiled Japanese Christian (Kirishitan) nuns under Beatas de Meaco (Kyoto) or Miyako no Bikuni (Kyoto), a Jesuit chaplain (Kyoto nun, 1615-1656) in Manila (De Pedro, Ernesto A. (January 4, 2019). Moon Sun- Deuk, a Ui Islander who survived a shipwreck in the Philippines, was a merchant who sailed and drifted to the Japanese island of Okinawa with his uncle and four other colleagues, then went to the northern Philippines and lived stayed there for 9 months (<https://m-en.yna.co.kr/2023-04-21>). Moon learned the language of the Yeosong region (Luzon) - possibly Ilocano, and had keen observations about the way of life of the people here. Considered the first Korean to learn Filipino, he was able to use his translation skills to converse with five Filipinos who were shipwrecked off the coast of Jeju Island in 1801 and returned home after 9 years. He was the first recorded Filipino interpreter during the Joseon Dynasty ([카드뉴스] 흥어장수 문순득표류기). In 1837, Andrew Kim Taegon and two other Korean Catholics took refuge in the Philippines after fleeing from a riot in Macau, where they were studying (Kutsumi 2007, p. 60). They lived in a monastery near Lolombo, Bocaue, Bulacan. Around 1935, some ginseng traders from Uiju, North Pyongan (present-day North Korea) came to this country via Vietnam.*

*Phase 2 from World War II to the 1970s.* During World War II, Japan sent Korean soldiers to occupy the Philippines. When the war ended, they stayed in the Philippines and married Filipino women then settled there (Kim Dong-yeop 2018: 287-317). One of them, Pak Yun-hwa, founded the Philippine Korean Association Inc. By 1969, the organization would grow into the Philippines' largest Korean organization (Kutsumi 2007, p. 61). Korean migrants to the Philippines during this period also included those

who came to the Philippines for the purpose of studying abroad or seeking economic development opportunities after Korea gained independence. In particular, this period included the migration of Korean brides marrying Philippine soldiers. During the Korean War, the Philippine army under the name of the United Nations army went to fight on the Korean peninsula. After the Korean War ended, Korean brides married Filipino soldiers who migrated to the Korean Peninsula before. immigrated to the Philippines with the desire to escape economic poverty and political and social instability because the Philippines was more developed than Korea at that time. About 30 Korean women moved to the Philippines with their husbands in the 1960s; in 1975, they founded the Mothers' Union (Kutsumi 2007, pp. 61-62).

*The third phase of the migration process was from the 1970s to the 1980s, and migration at this stage began to take on a more economic nature. During this time, the Korean economy began to develop at a rapid pace, also at a stage that showed the exchange of economic positions between Korea and the Philippines. Korean businesses entered the Philippine market, sending Korean employees to their business branches in the Philippines. These permanent employees, after their contracts with the company ended, stayed in the Philippines to open their own independent businesses. Korean migrants coming to the Philippines at this stage also included people working in international organizations such as ADB, WHO, IRRI or foreign businesses, international students, and missionaries migrating to the Philippines. then stayed and settled in the Philippines (Kim Dong-yeop 2018: 287-317).*

*The fourth phase of the migration process began in the 1990s, during this period the Korean economy developed miraculously with the "Miracle of the Han River", concurrent with the 1988 Winter Olympics held in Korea has enhanced its position in the region and internationally. This period also witnessed the huge gap between the economies of the two countries, and also witnessed the diverse expansion of Korean businesses in the Philippines (Kim Dong-yeop 2018: 287-317). Korean businessmen, not only from manufacturing companies but also from import-export businesses, restaurants, and construction companies, all established business associations dedicated to industry groups during this period (Kutsumi 2007, pp. 63-64).*

*The fifth phase of Korean migration history in the Philippines, starting in the late 1990s and 2000, was a period in which the number of students coming to study and live in the Philippines increased. This was also the time when the Philippines' visa policy removed barriers and became more relaxed to attract foreign students (Lorenzo, Isa 2007-07-20). It was also marked by the growing influence and participation of various Korean associations in mainstream Philippine society (Kutsumi 2007, p. 64). For example, the Merchants Association, founded in July 2001 and renamed the Financial Professionals Alliance in 2002, formalized the status of Korean businessmen working without appropriate visas, while the Korean Secondhand Car Import Association fights against the newly introduced secondhand car import ban and the Association of Travel Agencies works with the Philippine Department of Tourism to resolve visa and licensing issues for Korean tour guides who want to work in the Philippines (Kutsumi 2007, p. 65). This law is called Presidential Regulations, Article 156, which was introduced on December 12, 2002.*

#### 4.2. Reasons why Koreans settled in the Philippines

The phenomenon of Korean migration began strongly around the mid-19th century to 1910 when farmers and laborers in the Korean

peninsula migrated to China, Russia and Hawaii to escape famine, oppression. poverty and oppression by the ruling class.

From 1910 to 1945 when an exodus to Japan of Korean peninsula farmers and laborers were deprived of land and jobs and migrated to Japan to fill labor shortages created by Japan's wartime conditions.

From 1945 to 1962, many people in the South Korean Peninsula who were wives of US soldiers, students, adopted war orphans, and mixed-race children moved to the United States.

From 1962 onwards, Koreans began to leave as contract workers to Latin America, Western Europe, the Middle East, and North America in response to the migration policy adopted by the Korean government in 1962 promoting and encouraging Koreans to work and live abroad to ensure the safety of foreign exchange flows through dollar remittances. Furthermore, the liberalization of U.S. immigration policy in 1965 attracted a larger number of immigrants from Korea to the United States in search of better economic and educational opportunities.

By 2001, there were about 5.6 million Koreans in 151 countries around the world and this number is increasing every year to date (Song, Eulsub 2018).

According to many scholars, many Koreans living in the Philippines today are attracted by the low cost of English education and housing, both of which are significantly cheaper than those offered in their native Korea (Korea Times. 2009-09-13). The warmer climate is another driving factor for the recent wave of migration (Yoon, Won-sup 2006-07-09). The Philippines is also a popular destination for retired Koreans with fixed pensions. The Philippine government actively promotes the settlement of Korean retirees in the country because of the potential lucrative opportunities for the local economy (Garcia, Cathy Rose A. 2006-07-03). There are also known cases of settlement by North Koreans.

However, Korean migration to the Philippines is not a recent phenomenon. According to Kutsumi (2007), these Koreans settled in the Philippines since the eighth century due to the country's expanding trade with East and Southeast Asia. However, trade was not always the reason why they settled in the Philippines.

During World War II, some southern Koreans went to the Philippines as members of the Imperial Japanese Army. The officer who commanded all Japanese prison camps in the Philippines was actually Korean - Lieutenant General Hong Sa-Ik (Varangis, 2016).

Some scholars identify sociocultural factors as reasons why Koreans migrated to the Philippines. For example, Kim (1979) said that Koreans have become familiar with Filipinos. On the other hand, Blanca (2013) claims that there are Koreans who consider themselves assimilated into Philippine society.

Igno & Cenidoza (2016) argue that Koreans came to the Philippines due to their cultural popularity among Filipinos. They say that Filipinos love Hallyu or Korean popular culture because there are many similarities between Filipinos and Koreans. Both are hospitable, polite, sociable, expressive and romantic people. Both have close family ties and a colonial past. Because of these similarities, they concluded that Hallyu is not just a distinct trend, but a phenomenon that can be observed in the Philippines in the coming years. Many scholars observe that since the 1990s, there has been a kind of Korean Wave emerging in the Philippines in the

form of a growing influx of Korean immigrants. Attracted by the tropical weather and pristine beaches, the significantly lower cost of living and the close distance between the two countries, Koreans are now the top tourists in the Philippines with over a million visitors only in 2019. Besides short-term tourists who usually stay less than a week, about 100,000 Koreans have chosen to settle permanently in the Philippines (Kim, D. (2016).

Meanwhile, Koreans have settled in Metro Manila, Tarlac, Baguio, Dumaguete, and Cebu (Miralao, 2007) as well as in the Bataan cities of Orion and Limay (Sadia & Salvador, 2014) due to business, English education and entertainment opportunities. According to Sangil (2015) there are about 15,000 Koreans residing along the US-Philippines Friendship Highway in Angeles City, which is due to: (1) proximity to Clark International Airport; and (2) Angeles City's favorable business environment.

### *4.3. Basic characteristics of Koreans migrating to the Philippines*

*First, Koreans migrating to the Philippines typically fall into one of three categories: businessmen, students, and missionaries.* For businessmen, the growth of Korean companies in the Philippines increased economic cooperation between the two countries, which in turn led to the first wave of Korean immigration. The second wave produced economic refugees who fled their homeland after the 1997 Asian financial crisis when they lost all their assets. Moving to the Philippines gives them a second chance as well as the opportunity to escape the judgmental eyes of relatives and neighbors (D. Kim, 2016: 253). These economic migrants have established small businesses such as restaurants, grocery stores, KTV bars, Internet cafes, and travel and tourism companies—all of which cater exclusively to Koreans.

Similarly, the arrival of Korean students is also driven by Korea's growing prosperity. Incredible economic progress has not only raised family incomes, it has also expanded the Korean middle class, who can now afford to send their children and family members to learn English or study abroad at university like the Philippines (Yoon, 2006: 14). The Korean students interviewed for this project unanimously emphasized that learning English is mandatory because getting a well-paying job in Korea requires them to pass a Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC). Salaries in Korea are determined in part by the employee's TOEIC score (Miralao, 2007: 32).

*Second, the migration model of Koreans in the Philippines is a top-down reverse migration model.* Most of the existing literature on migration focuses on the movement of people from less developed to more developed countries, motivated by hopes for a better life, more opportunities in abroad (Croucher, 2009: 468). In most multi-ethnic societies, there is usually one majority group that dominates and discriminates against other minority groups. Competition for scarce resources inevitably leads to a system of ethnic stratification, whereby the majority group monopolizes power and social resources while minorities are excluded from social opportunity structures. However, for the Korean diaspora in the Philippines, this top-down model is reversed such that Korean immigrants and visitors are socially and economically superior to the native population. In a similar vein, Croucher's (2009) case study of Americans choosing to live in Mexico exploring what it means to migrate reverses the lens to focus on migration from an economically and politically powerful sending country to a less powerful host country (Croucher, 2009: 465).



The influx of Koreans to the Philippines today represents a departure from earlier Korean diasporas driven by political oppression and repression and/or by economic hardship; On the contrary, the current wave of Korean migration to the Philippines is being driven by South Korea's growing prosperity (Mirallao, 2007: 25).

For their part, members of the Philippine host culture were confused by this anomaly. Filipinos repeatedly expressed confusion and bewilderment as to why "rich" Koreans would want to trade First World comforts and conveniences for endless restrictions and inconveniences of the Third World. Locals wondered why these Koreans, who were considered capable of migrating directly to other industrialized countries, chose to settle in the Philippines.

Third, there is the phenomenon of "Koreanization" in places where Koreans live in the Philippines. The phenomenon of "Koreanization" has been observed in at least three distinct types of urban spaces: residential areas, universities and commercial areas (Gomez, 2011: 51). Korean establishments are easily identified by signage in Hangeul script that locals cannot understand, thus acting as a de facto "No Trespassing" sign. When Koreans began moving into neighboring areas, their presence was as immediate and indelible as could be seen.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper has initially explored and explained a special phenomenon in international migration, the phenomenon of Korean migrants coming to the Philippines. If other countries tend to migrate from poor, developing countries to developed countries, the case of Korea is more special. Korea is a developed country, but Koreans tend to migrate to less developed countries, typically the Philippines. Through the paper, we also presented an overview of the migration history and stages of Korean migration to the Philippines with its basic reasons and characteristics.

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