

Completion Report

Transnational Geographies of Japanese Retirees in the Philippines: Networks, Engagement and the Production of Urban Space

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This study clarifies the nature, extent, and patterns of Japanese retiree migration in the Philippines, focusing on the experiences of those who have availed themselves of the Special Resident Retiree's Visa (SRRV). While the programs of the Philippine Retirement Agency (PRA) tend to underscore the investment aspects of retirement in the Philippines, the Japanese retirees we interviewed were more interested in issues of livability. Similar to other nationalities, Japanese retirees chose the Philippines for its tropical climate, cheaper commodities and services, and warm hospitality. In Metro Manila, Japanese retirees tend to settle in new business districts (Makati CBD and Bonifacio Global City) where condominium developments and high-end gated communities are located. The same spatial pattern takes place in other parts of the Philippines, where retirees tend to locate in cities with growing real estate markets. Because of their living arrangements in secured residential units, compounded by language barriers, everyday engagement with Filipinos is fairly limited. Furthermore, retirees tend to go back and forth between the Philippines and Japan, creating a seasonal transnational mobility pattern. In the Philippines, Japanese networks are important to the survival of Japanese retirees. These not only include personal networks, but also formal organizations and institutions, such as the PRA Japanese Club, various marketing agencies, and businesses that support Japanese retirees.

During the last few decades, Japanese retirement to the Philippines can be described by two waves of movement. Prior the SSRV program, Japanese retirees have been settling in the Philippines, most of whom were male businessmen working for Japanese companies in the Philippines and/or husbands of Filipinas. For these retirees who were already in the Philippines, the creation of the SSRV program has facilitated their legal status since it is faster and relatively cheaper compared to other available visa categories. For the more recent wave of SSRV Japanese retirees, PRA-accredited realty firms serve as important brokers in bringing in retirees to the Philippines. Several of these brokers offer retirement packages that include SSRVs along with the purchase of condominium units in the Philippines, creating a linkage between condominium real estate development and retirement. To attract more retirees as investors, PRA reduced the minimum retirement age to 35 years old, and set different deposit requirements depending on age, which can be converted to investments and/or condominium purchases. But for several older Japanese retirees, the emphasis on investment goes against the main reason for their retirement in the Philippines, which is to enjoy a restful life with a high quality of living during their older years. According them, what they need are better facilities and services that address their needs as elderly.

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