



PART ONE

# Figures of Desires



WHERE DOES ONE BEGIN TO map zones of encounters? Classic ethnographies began with stories of arrival that located the ethnographer and the reader in an unfamiliar world, a world that the text promised to render comprehensible. This “setting trope” at once delineated the object of ethnographic study as a fixed and bounded culture and established the ethnographer’s territorial claims to it.<sup>1</sup> But when we focus on zones of encounters, the object of our analyses is not a culture or a people but sets of contingent, translocal relationships in which we are in different ways implicated. What different points of departure, and arrival, does such an analysis entail?

Understanding cultural encounters means paying attention to the affective commitments—the wishes, wants, objectives, dreams, goals, aspirations, and longings—that shape people’s everyday lives and lead their paths to cross. It also means understanding the intertwined historical, social, and political-economic processes through which people come to articulate and act on their desires. I use the word *desires* here to refer to the ways that cultural and political-economic processes play out at the level of the subject. I am building on Michel Foucault’s argument that desires are products not of universal and subconscious human needs but of historical processes and social and political-economic relations of power.<sup>2</sup> They are, as Lisa Rofel suggests, key tropes through which people come to understand themselves as subjects in a neoliberal and globalized world.<sup>3</sup> They are thus useful theoretical tools for understanding the different subjective and located ways that people inhabit these processes.

To give a preliminary sense of the kinds of desires that guided Filipina women and Japanese men to their relationships in Central Kiso, I’ll offer two ethnographic sound bites. The first is from a conversation I had in Metro Manila with a woman named Marites, who is the younger cousin of a Filipina friend in Central Kiso. Twenty-four years old at the time, Marites was soon to return to Japan on her sixth six-month contract as an entertainer. She had agreed to an audio-recorded interview about her decision to go to Japan and her work experiences there.

“I just wanted to go,” Marites told me in a mixture of Tagalog and Japanese when I asked her why she had first decided to work in Japan. We

were sitting in the small house in Manila that her cousin had built for her mother. Marites told me that she had for some time wanted to go to “America,” but after watching many young women from her neighborhood, including her older cousin, go to Japan as entertainers, she had also grown curious about what life was like there. She had wondered, “When they return to the Philippines, why are they so beautiful? Their hair is colored. They bring bracelets, necklaces. So I was curious. I wanted to go to Japan. Maybe I could be beautiful.”

Marites suggested that other dreams had also prompted her to go abroad. She told me that after watching her cousin return from Japan and purchase a house and business for her family, she decided that she wanted to try to do the same. She explained, “I saw my cousin. She didn’t need to work as a prostitute. But she had a brain. So she could build her own house. I thought to myself, why not me? Maybe I’m capable of that too. So I wanted to try, on my own, without help from anybody.”

Now consider a conversation I had with the husband of a Filipina woman in Central Kiso, a man I’ll call Tanaka-san, about his decision to marry his Filipina wife, whom he had met while she was working in a local hostess bar.

“I didn’t marry her because she was beautiful,” Tanaka-san explained in Japanese. “In Japan we have a saying: In three days you get sick of a beautiful woman and used to an ugly one.”

I tried to mask my discomfort with his comments as he continued. “I dated a lot of women before I married my wife, a lot of Filipinas that I met in local bars.”

“How many?” I asked.

Tanaka-san waved his fingers in the air and replied that he couldn’t count them all on both hands.

“Why so many?” I pushed.

“I dated them to see if I liked them enough to marry them. You don’t know if you want to marry someone until you date them.”

“But why Filipinas?”

“After I hit thirty I started to like Filipinas.”

“Why?” I pressed.

Tanaka-san paused. “I really couldn’t say.” He reflected for a moment and then replied, “They have the good characteristics of traditional Japanese women. I like that in a woman. They look up to their husbands. They respect them. They listen to what their husbands say.”

“What attracted you to your wife out of all the Filipinas you dated?” I asked.

“I couldn’t really say,” Tanaka-san responded. “Part of it was that the timing was right. I also liked her because she was poor. Because I wanted to help her.”

These two anecdotes suggest that both Filipina women and Japanese men crafted senses of self through their relationships. They also suggest that members of these groups brought desires for certain kinds of futures to their interactions. Yet, while their visions may have in some places overlapped, they were also strikingly different. Like many of the Filipina women I discuss in the pages that follow, Marites told me that she was inspired to go to Japan by dreams of glamour and travel that resonated with her image of “America.” She also wanted to help her family while asserting her independence. In contrast, a number of Japanese men married to Filipina women in Central Kiso expressed nostalgia for traditional times and gender roles. They also suggested desires to craft a sense of masculinity based on feelings of both benevolence toward and superiority over “poor” Filipina women. As I later mention, some of these men also expressed cosmopolitan desires to travel and an interest in the Philippines.

In the second half of this book, I will explore the alignments, misalignments, and gaps that developed between Filipina migrants’ and Japanese residents’ desires. In this half, I first want to consider: How did these different forms of desire come to be in the first place? What gave them shape and force in Filipina migrants’ and Central Kiso residents’ lives? Filipina women’s decisions to marry rural Japanese men, and Japanese men’s interest in Filipina women as brides, cannot be understood within a singular top-down narrative of globalization. While their desires were in some sense linked by globally circulating discourses of modernity, cosmopolitanism, and capitalism, these discourses have taken a range of culturally and geographically specific forms in Japan and the Philippines. In the three chapters that follow, I explore how the desires that Filipina migrants and Central Kiso residents brought to their encounters took shape through discrepant, but not unconnected, sets of social and political-economic relations involving not only Japan and the Philippines but also the United States. Specifically, I focus on the ways these social, political-economic, and cultural relations condensed dreams and life-worlds into recognizable, beckoning shapes: the beautiful and glamorous world of show business; “America”; the cosmopolitan; discourses of wealthy, urban Japanese masculinity; a modern Japanese nation. I call these charismatic cultural forms

“figures of desire.” I take the idea of the “figure” from Donna Haraway and Claudia Castañeda, who stress the way that figures at once condense meaning and give it form.<sup>4</sup> Unlike passive objects of desire, figures of desire give shape to people’s dreams, just as they emerge through the material relations that inform the very dreams people can imagine. The figures of desire invoked by Filipina migrants and Japanese residents in Central Kiso were beacons that guided them in both predictable and unexpected ways along intersecting paths. How did these figures come to define the dreams of Filipina migrants and Japanese residents and to mark the routes that led them to their relationships with each other? How and why did these dreams take hold?

## Sites of Encounter

In my morning newspaper, I occasionally found fliers for local Filipina hostess bars. Printed in dark red ink on glossy white paper, one such ad featured a large eye-catching photograph of seven women: Four were smiling, two had serious expressions, and one seemed to be caught off guard by the camera. Five of the women, standing on a stage, were dressed in white spandex pantsuits with beaded detail and low-cut spaghetti-strap tops, posed in a line like Las Vegas showgirls, their hips sharply angled toward the camera, front knees cocked. The two women sitting in front, their crossed legs hanging off the stage, wore similar outfits in black. Printed in bold Japanese lettering, the caption read: “Cabaret Boracay’s First Year Anniversary Gratitude Service. Thanks to you, we have made it through our first year. We would like to earnestly thank all for their support. We are trying to be even more ‘inexpensive and friendly’ so we hope you will increase your patronage. From the owner and employees together.” And below the photograph: “One complimentary reserve bottle. Shows daily!”

The flier, sandwiched between local advertisements and announcements—town hall and community center notices about regional events, ads for sales at the local kimono store and the neighborhood shoe and sportswear shops, and fliers from grocers listing the week’s specials: fuji apples, three for ¥200, or salmon, 200 grams for ¥500—reminded me that Filipina hostess bars were embedded in the mundane practices of everyday life in Central Kiso. The flyer from a local shoe shop had pictures

of fashionable leather pumps and tennis shoes on sale, the latest arrivals from France and the United States. Alongside this ad, one could read the bar's flier as suggesting that its Filipina employees were analogous to new shoes, the latest commodities available for purchase. The objectifying gaze of the camera belied the ad's claim that the women, like the owner, are the bar's humble and gracious hosts. However, if one focuses on the sharpness of the women's poses and their smiles and stares, one could also glimpse in the photograph the dreams and goals that led these women to work in bars in Japan.

I contrast these two ways of reading the bar advertisement because they reflect familiar lines of feminist debate regarding women's experiences with forms of sexualized labor. During the 1980s and into the 1990s, feminist scholars disagreed, often fiercely, over how to understand women's participation in areas such as prostitution, bar work, pornography, and correspondence marriages. Some argued that these practices evidenced the ways women have been subject to exploitation and violence in patriarchal and capitalist worlds. Others, however, saw in them women's struggles for self-determination and even forms of empowerment.<sup>1</sup> Debates over these issues continue today, informing feminist positions on a range of issues, spanning prostitution, to marriage, to human trafficking. At the heart of these debates lie questions of choice and individual agency, and specifically whether women can freely choose to do sexualized labor or whether they are always in some sense directly or indirectly forced into it.

In recent years, feminist ethnographers have complicated the premises of these arguments. They have suggested that while women who engage in prostitution and correspondence marriages are agents, their agency is always configured within unequal relations of power.<sup>2</sup> Many of these scholars are drawing on practice theory, which maintains that human action does not simply reflect the autonomous will of an individual human subject, but is always situated within social, cultural, and political-economic structures of power.<sup>3</sup> This insight has complicated our understanding of what human agency means in relation to sexualized forms of labor. For example, feminist ethnographers have shown that gender ideologies, capitalist structures, and discourses of cosmopolitan modernity inform women's choices and actions in sexualized economies. However, these studies have paid less attention to how the forms women's agency takes become possible through the everyday dynamics of social relationships. They have shown us little of these historical and cultural processes.

While still being mindful of the ways that formations of power shape people's lives and decisions, I want to shift the terrain of these inquiries.



Every Filipina woman I met in Central Kiso told me that she did not intend to marry a Japanese man when she went to Japan to work in a hostess bar—most women told me that they had boyfriends in the Philippines at the time, and some also shared unflattering impressions of Japanese men. Japanese men married to Filipina women in the region similarly relayed that in their youth they could never have imagined marrying a Filipina woman, and particularly one who worked in a hostess bar. Yet in the 1980s and 1990s, Filipina hostess bars became important places in Central Kiso where marriages developed between members of these groups. In fact, most Filipina women in Central Kiso told me romantic and dramatic stories about “falling in love” with their husbands, whom they met in these bars. How, then, can we understand these bars as places in which their relationships developed?

In this chapter, I focus on Filipina hostess bars as *sites of encounter* in which Filipina migrants’ and their Japanese customers’ divergent, yet in both cases ambivalent, desires came into unequal yet productive relation in ways that transformed people’s senses of self and the possibilities they imagined for their lives. I use the expression *sites of encounter* to refer to the ways that these bars figured as nodes of social relationships where different histories, genealogies of meaning, and forms of desire coincided within unequal relations of power. Doreen Massey has argued that places are best understood as spatial-temporal events: power-laden processes that both include and stretch beyond local relations and that are full of internal differences and conflicts.<sup>4</sup> Here I consider how specific localized configurations of historical contingencies came to bear on Filipina women’s and their Japanese customers’ experiences in these bars and made new forms of relationships—such as romance and marriage—possible between them.

In what follows, I examine three factors that shaped these bars as sites of encounter and enabled them to become places where Filipina women and Japanese men met spouses: the coinciding histories through which Filipina hostess bars were established in Central Kiso, Filipina women’s experiences of glamour and shame in their bar employment, and the ways these bars enabled Japanese customers to articulate themselves as wealthy and modern “Japanese men” while making them painfully aware of their exclusions from this category.

#### A NOTE ON BARS

Before I continue, I should note that I am using the term *hostess bars* to gloss a range of establishments that might otherwise be differentiated as

snack bars (*sunakku*), pubs (*pabu*), cabarets (*kyabarē*), and clubs (*kurabu*). The basis of these distinctions generally lies in the prices an establishment charges (clubs are usually the most expensive) and the services it offers, for example, a cabaret might feature a show. However, I found that Filipina women in Central Kiso characterized their experiences working in these businesses less in terms of the type of establishment where they were or had been employed and more in relation to the specific expectations and personality of a given owner or *mama-san*.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, over the course of several contracts in Japan, a woman might work at a variety of these establishments. Some Filipina women told me that when they applied to go to Japan they were asked whether they wanted to work in a hotel or in a club, but others never spoke of having this option. (These women also had very little say regarding what part of Japan they would be working in; they were either requested by bar owners or assigned by their promotion agency.) Because these women described their job responsibilities and relationships with customers at all of the aforementioned types of establishments in very similar ways—they were expected to perform manual labor and entertain customers along lines that I describe later—I group them together and use the terms interchangeably.

I do, however, distinguish the bars I discuss from businesses that explicitly offer sexual services, such as pink salons (*pinku saron*), soaplands (*sōpu rando*), or brothels.<sup>6</sup> Although some women working in hostess bars develop sexual relationships with customers, prostitution is technically illegal in Japan and, as I discuss later, women working in hostess bars (including Japanese women) do not necessarily have sexual relationships with bar clients.<sup>7</sup> Based on her fieldwork in an elite hostess bar in Tokyo during the early 1980s, Anne Allison argues that in hostess bars, Japanese men are not paying for sex or for “the woman,” but for the eroticization of the man, for his projection as a powerful and desirable male.<sup>8</sup> Thus while hostesses are performing sexualized labor, they do not necessarily offer sexual services. Rather, they are paid to make men feel special, at ease, and indulged, or to, as one customer explained to Allison, “feel like a man.”<sup>9</sup> This distinction between bar work and prostitution was crucial to Filipina women I knew. Not one Filipina woman in Central Kiso identified herself to me as a prostitute or sex worker (although they occasionally identified other Filipina women working at bars in such terms).

Hostess bars developed in Japan during the period of postwar economic growth as part of a set of stratified processes facilitating corporate capital accumulation. However, these bars also find precedents in a number of

different kinds of establishments, including prewar cafés and special coffee shops (*tokushu kissa*) and postwar cabarets that catered to U.S. American occupation forces.<sup>10</sup> Early hostess bars catered to elites—wealthy businessmen, male politicians, and the like—and were important sites for *settai* (business entertaining) during Japan’s high-growth period between the late 1960s through the 1980s.<sup>11</sup> Hostess bars are also ranked hierarchically according to the perceived quality of their service and the women who work there and, correspondingly, to their cost. At the high-class hostess bar in Tokyo where Allison conducted fieldwork in the early 1980s, elite corporate employees paid large sums of money to be flattered and served drinks by what were considered to be very attractive and refined women. During my fieldwork, less expensive hostess bars, including those in rural areas and those catering to working-class men, were generally acknowledged as “lower ranked,” and the women who worked at these bars were often considered to be less attractive and refined.<sup>12</sup>

I use the term *Filipina hostess bar* to refer to bars that employed Filipina women as hostesses. Beginning in the late 1970s and into the 1980s and 1990s, the range and numbers of bars employing women to serve and entertain customers expanded. As the Japanese economy grew in the 1970s and 1980s, young Japanese women began to move into pink- and white-collar work, and women from places outside Japan—including the Philippines, Korea, China, Taiwan, Thailand, Rumania, and Russia—increasingly were hired to replace Japanese women in what were usually considered to be lower-ranking bars throughout the country.<sup>13</sup> In some clubs, women from various countries (including Japan) worked alongside each other; often, however, bars featured women of a particular nationality. In the mid-1980s, women from the Philippines came to be the largest group of foreign women employed in hostess bars in Japan, and Filipina hostess bars came to occupy a particular niche within the sex industry in Japan.

In this chapter I focus on Filipina hostess bars as they existed in Central Kiso from the early 1980s through the 1990s. As I discuss in the epilogue, these bars no longer exist quite as I characterize them. First, *Sampagita*, the bar I describe in this chapter, closed in 2002 on account of “poor management” (or so I was told by some Filipina women in the region). Second, changes in Japan’s immigration policies since 1999 have made both being in Japan without a visa and procuring entertainer visas to come to Japan considerably more difficult, and ultimately forced many bars in the area to shut down.<sup>14</sup> In addition, the economies of both Central Kiso and the Philippines have increasingly worsened over the

past ten years, making for more demoralizing and difficult working conditions for Filipina migrants. Recent decentralization policies initiated by the national government have increasingly strained rural regions, reducing national economic support that provided jobs and pushing rural areas to become economically self-sufficient.<sup>15</sup> As a result, men in rural areas have considerably less money to spend at bars.

In the Philippines, economic policies have continued to benefit elites and foreign corporations at the expense of workers.<sup>16</sup> These policies have made people in the Philippines more desperate to find work abroad and thus more vulnerable when they are overseas. During my fieldwork in the late 1990s, Filipina women with whom I spoke in Central Kiso complained that those working in bars were increasingly pressured to, in their words, “do more” with customers to sustain their interest. While most of these women were ambiguous about what this meant, some explained that they were expected to wear more revealing clothes and that more customers now expected to be able to grope them, possibly leading to sexual relations. They spoke with frustration about how much more challenging the job had become in comparison to their earlier stints working in bars in the 1980s and early 1990s. I discuss Filipina women’s experiences in these bars in more detail later in this chapter. First, though, let me trace the coinciding political-economic histories through which Filipina hostess bars came to be established in Central Kiso.

#### COINCIDING HISTORIES

As sites of encounter for Filipina migrants and local Japanese men, Filipina hostess bars in Central Kiso emerged through the convergence of two distinctly located, although not unconnected, sets of political-economic histories: (1) the establishment of hostess bars, and later Filipina hostess bars, in the region, and (2) the development of overseas labor migration, and particularly Filipina migration to Japan as entertainers, as an accumulation strategy in the Philippines. These two histories reflect distinctive, locally situated strategies through which people in both the Philippines and rural Japan have tried to manage the marginality that has accompanied their incorporation into larger national and global visions of capitalist modernity. These histories were also shaped by U.S. Cold War policy in Japan and the Philippines; economic policies initiated by the IMF, World Bank, and the U.S.-backed Marcos regime; and Japanese and U.S. investment and overseas direct assistance (ODA) to the Philippines. These bars, then, are more than sites of encounter for

Filipina migrants and Japanese townfolk. They also are nodes within broader geopolitical sets of relationships that in different ways involve not only Japan and the Philippines, but also those of us in the United States, who craft lives in the wake of such projects.

As I trace, in the pages that follow, the histories through which Filipina hostess bars developed in Central Kiso, I restrain from weaving my narratives together in a single causal framework. I also strive not to privilege one narrative over another and instead foreground the contingencies and unequal collaborations through which these bars have come into being in Central Kiso as sites of encounter.

### *History I: On Dams and Bars*

One high-level employee of the Kisofukushima Town Hall told me that women working in hostess bars in Central Kiso were a modern-day derivative of geisha who once served both local elites and important travelers and officials passing through the area.<sup>17</sup> This man's comment was a pointed reminder of the region's location along important travel and trade routes during the Tokugawa period, a time that, as I discuss in chapter 3, some residents nostalgically contrasted with the economic struggles the region was facing at the time. Other middle-aged friends, however, suggested that hostess bars were introduced to the town in the late 1950s to provide entertainment for the construction workers who came to the area to build the Makio Dam in the nearby Mitake and Ōtaki villages. Funded by World Bank loans that stipulated that the heavy equipment necessary to build the dam be purchased from U.S.-based companies, the Makio Dam was part of the Aichi Waterworks Project (Aichi Yōsui Keikaku), jointly commissioned by regional and national Japanese governments (and clearly supported by the U.S. government) as part of a wave of modernization and development projects begun during the post-war years to rebuild the Japanese economy.<sup>18</sup> Specifically, the project was intended to supply water and electrical power to the growing industrial region in and around Nagoya, a major port, manufacturing center, and now the fourth largest city in Japan. To this day, automobile, steel, agricultural, and other manufacturing industries in this area depend on the Kiso River for at least part of their water and power needs.

The Aichi Yōsui Kōdan (Aichi Waterworks Corporation) oversaw construction of the dam, hiring contract laborers throughout the country to do the work. These men resided in Central Kiso for the four years it took to complete the project (1957–1961), introducing large amounts of



Figure 1. A view of the Kiso River from a bridge in Kisofukushima, September, 1998.

money (with their disposable incomes) into the then desperate local economy. Providing for the workers' entertainment in a manner to which these often urban-based laborers were accustomed prompted the development of two movie theaters, a string of pachinko parlors, and the first hostess bars in Central Kiso. Friends who had been raised in the region reminisced about this period when "Kiso was so rich!" For these residents, the luxury of the movie theaters, now long closed (the pachinko parlors, like the bars, have survived), and the improved standard of living contrasted starkly with the poverty and deprivation of the years during and immediately following the Pacific War.

However, the Aichi Waterworks Project yielded for local residents not only the pleasures of incorporation into a modernizing Japan, but also dangers, frustrations, and unfulfilled desires. The damming of the river displaced entire hamlets, prompting local protests against the plans.<sup>19</sup> The construction project also made local women feel vulnerable. My friend Sachiko, who was a high school student at the time, remembered how her mother cautioned her not to walk alone at night out of fear that she might be raped by dam workers. Others commented about how envious they had been of the families of the construction companies' managers and

engineers, whose incomes far surpassed those of local residents. Sachiko recalled her wonder at the large amounts of food one construction manager's son consumed as a paying boarder in their home. His hearty appetite was a daily reminder of the luxury and indulgence of his father's position and the different standard by which her family lived. As Sachiko put it, shaking her head with both bitterness and wonder, "We were living quite a different lifestyle!"

According to Sachiko, many bars closed shortly after the dam was finished and the workers left the area. However, other local residents maintained that just as many bars remained. Several residents explained that as local economies in the region became increasingly cash dependent, men (and women) from nearby villages who had previously been self-sufficient began seeking employment in logging and construction (building roads, bridges, and dams). As these industries flourished, people came to Central Kiso from other parts of Japan in search of work.<sup>20</sup> These laborers provided a new client base for local bars. I was told that some construction companies even began treating their workers to periodic evenings in them.

Between the late 1950s and the late 1970s, hostess bars in Central Kiso, like the majority of those throughout Japan, employed only Japanese women. The shift to employ Filipina women in these bars was part of a larger trend throughout Japan that can in part be linked to the U.S. military presence in Okinawa and other parts of Japan. Thus, the development of a labor niche for Filipina women in hostess bars has historical ties to both the occupation of Okinawa by Japan and to U.S. Cold War policy and its continued investment in maintaining a strategic military presence throughout the Pacific. In the 1960s, as the value of the Japanese yen continued to rise, the ability of U.S. military personnel to purchase Japanese commodities and labor diminished. The wages of Okinawan women who had previously worked in bars around U.S. bases became too high to accommodate demand. After the Ryukyu Islands were transferred to Japan in the mid-1970s, owners of bars in the region began to employ Filipina women, who on account of their migration status were more vulnerable and would work for lower wages, to serve the U.S. military who remained on bases in the region. Soon, bars catering to locals and Japanese tourists also began to hire Filipina women, and the bar industry around U.S. bases broadened to include not only Filipina but also Thai women. Women from these two countries now make up the bulk of foreign women working in sex industries on Okinawa, and Filipina hostess bars can be found around U.S. military bases across Japan.<sup>21</sup>

The first Filipina hostess bar in Kisofukushima was opened by a woman named Yamada Tomoko, who herself had worked in hostess bars in the Kiso region for many years. The daughter of a fisherman in Kumamoto, on the west coast of Kyushu, Yamada-san came to Kisofukushima in 1959, when she was nineteen. She had left Kyushu to work in a textile factory in Nagoya, but finding the work unsatisfactory, she proceeded to Kisofukushima, where her uncle was working in the logging industry and her aunt was working in a sushi bar in the area. Her aunt's employers also owned a hostess bar, and they soon employed Yamada-san there. Yamada-san recalled that at the time there were at least eight hostess bars in the town of Kisofukushima, and others in the nearby town of Agematsu and throughout the county, that catered primarily to men working on dam construction and in the lumber industry. Over the next few years, Yamada-san worked at a variety of bars in Kisofukushima, in regional cities such as Shiojiri and Matsumoto, and back in Kyushu, where she returned briefly. Then in 1966, a former boss in Kisofukushima offered her a job as a mama-san at a new bar he was opening. Twelve years later at this bar, Kurabu Yume (Club Dream), Yamada-san first hired Filipina women as hostesses.

Yamada-san explained that in 1978, while she was working as the mama-san at Kurabu Yume, a promoter based in Matsumoto approached her and proposed hiring Filipina women at her club. At the time, she recalled, promoter fees were high and hiring Filipina women was more expensive than employing Japanese women. Yamada-san told me that she decided to take the business risk because she was ambitious. The local economy, which was benefiting from a domestic tourism boom, was doing well and, she suggested, Filipina women would be something new and different in the town. Yamada-san was also increasingly having difficulty finding young Japanese women who were willing to work at bars in the countryside. At first, Yamada-san hired only two or three Filipina women who worked alongside an equal number of Japanese hostesses.<sup>22</sup> She recalled that customers would come into the bar just to see the Filipina women because they looked different than Japanese women. "They had dark skin and prominent features," she explained. A long-time denizen of local hostess bars also mentioned that men in the area were initially interested in the Filipina women, "because it was a first, because they were a novelty." He later explained that Japanese hostesses in the region tended to be in their thirties or forties (younger Japanese women had moved to the cities); in contrast, the Filipina women were in their early twenties, if not younger. Their youth also contributed to their popularity.

According to Yamada-san, some customers preferred to sit with the



Japanese women with whom they could more easily converse. However, others wanted to sit with the Filipina women. In the beginning, Yamada-san would seat a Filipina woman on one side of a customer and a Japanese woman on the other. She explained that sometimes the customer liked to just look at the Filipina woman and to talk to the Japanese woman. Based on her clients' favorable response, Yamada-san decided to hire more Filipina women. However, Kurabu Yume was too small to be eligible for work visas for more than three women. In 1980, another opportunity arose for Yamada-san: a large ramen shop up the highway went on sale at auction. Yamada-san purchased the property with the aim of fulfilling her dream of owning her own business. She converted the restaurant into a club—Club Tomoko—with the intention of running it as a Filipina hostess bar. A few years after Yamada-san started hiring Filipina women, another bar followed suit—it did not want to lose out to Club Tomoko, which was attracting more customers; Filipina women had become a selling point for the bar.

When I began my research in 1998, local residents whom I asked agreed that for nearly a decade all hostess bars in Central Kiso had employed Filipina women almost exclusively.<sup>23</sup> At the time, six of the nine bars in Kisofukushima were being run by Filipina *mama-sans*.<sup>24</sup> Club Tomoko was the oldest Filipina bar in the area. Relatively successful, Yamada-san hired ten Filipina women every six months, not infrequently rehiring women over several contracts. According to Yamada-san, most of her customers were men who lived nearby, many of whom had associations with the construction industry, which was by then financially suffering but still to some degree supported by national and regional public works projects. Sometimes truck drivers and men on business or staying in vacation homes (both company and privately owned) in the area also came in. One middle-aged Japanese friend explained that unlike white-collar workers, who have fixed monthly salaries, men in the construction industry received their relatively high salaries on a daily or weekly basis; thus, they regularly had large amounts of money to spend on entertainment. Although many bar customers worked in construction, I learned (despite the protests and denials of some of my middle-aged Japanese women friends in town), that many men employed at the town hall and from elite families also sometimes patronized Filipina hostess bars.

### *History II: Filipina Migration to Japan*

Filipina migration to Central Kiso is part of a larger-scale migration of Filipina women to work at bars in Japan that began in the late 1970s,

dramatically accelerated during the 1980s, and continued growing in the 1990s. Previous studies have linked this migration trend to Japanese and U.S. American sex tourism to the Philippines, which flourished after the onset of martial law there in 1972.<sup>25</sup> However, this explanation alone cannot explain why many Filipina women who work in hostess bars entered Japan legally on skilled-labor entertainer visas or the ways that many of these women associated work in hostess bars with the glamorous and desirable world of show business. Only by considering how a history of Japanese and U.S. American sex tourism in the Philippines converged with a tradition of Filipina cultural dance performance can we understand Filipina migration to Japan to work in hostess bars and the ways these women came to understand their relationships with the Japanese men they met in them.

Filipina women who came to work in clubs in Japan with government-issued entertainer visas were technically hired as cultural performers. The six-month visas these women received were the same visas issued to professional dance troupes and celebrities when they came to Japan to, for example, perform at big shows. A tradition of cultural dance performance in the Philippines dates to the early twentieth century when Francesca Reyes Aquino, inspired by the U.S. colonial introduction of physical education and European folk dances in schools, founded the first Filipino folk dance company and began staging dances for U.S. colonial officers. Early dance troupes were tied to elite universities, such as the University of the Philippines. In 1958, the Bayanihan Folk Dance Company, associated with the Philippine Women's University, garnered international recognition when it performed at the World Expo in Brussels and then appeared on the *Ed Sullivan Show*.<sup>26</sup> Soon universities and private organizations throughout the Philippines began forming their own folk dance troupes, and cultural dancing became a popular recreational activity for elite youth throughout the country.<sup>27</sup> Beginning in the 1960s, large numbers of professional Filipino cultural dance troupes began performing on U.S. military bases in Saigon, Okinawa, Guam, Hawaii, and the Japanese mainland. During the 1970s, Filipina/o cultural dancers and performers were also increasingly hired as entertainment on U.S. cruise ships and in big hotels and tourist spots in Japan. This tradition of cultural performance offered a precedent for issuing entertainer visas to a growing number of Filipina women who entered Japan to work in clubs in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>28</sup>

At the same time that growing numbers of Filipina/o cultural performers began performing abroad, the U.S.-backed Marcos administration, working in concert with the World Bank, the IMF, and the U.S.

government, began engineering a new economic order—what some have called “authoritative modernization”—to “integrate” the Philippines into the world economy.<sup>29</sup> These strategies were part of a larger process of liberalizing the Philippine economy that involved devaluing the peso, dismantling previous import-substitution protections that had slowed foreign investment during the 1950s and 1960s, and adopting an export-led industrial and agricultural economy.<sup>30</sup> The export-oriented economy, however, encouraged farmers to cultivate monocultural crops that relied on prices set in a global market, which declined drastically during the late 1970s.<sup>31</sup> Land reform and “Green Revolution” technologies initiated during this period also failed to give tenant farmers control over the land they worked and effectively concentrated control of agriculture in the hands of wealthy landowners.<sup>32</sup> The result was extreme poverty in many areas, coupled with the dispossession and deterritorialization of the bulk of rural laborers.<sup>33</sup> Many of these rural laborers went to Manila to look for work.<sup>34</sup>

Alongside these changes in rural areas, during the 1970s the Marcos government, again together with the IMF and World Bank, developed three strategies to bring foreign currency into the Philippines and thereby manage the country’s growing external national debt: creating export-processing zones, encouraging overseas labor migration, and developing the tourism industry. These projects also tended to benefit wealthy elites and foreign nationals at the expense of workers. First, the development of export-processing zones was designed to attract foreign investment, in part by dissuading union organizing and keeping wages depressed.<sup>35</sup> Second, as development strategies continued to fail, the Marcos government increasingly encouraged overseas labor migration (in which migrants were expected to remit significant portions of their incomes home) as a national economic strategy to bring foreign currency into the Philippine economy.<sup>36</sup> Initially, primarily Filipino men went as contract workers to the Middle East to work in construction.<sup>37</sup> However, as I discuss later, by the early 1980s, growing numbers of Filipina women were looking for contract work abroad.

Third, the Marcos administration made developing the Philippines’ tourism industry a central pillar of its economic plan. In 1973, Marcos created the Ministry of Tourism, which, over the course of the 1970s, saw to the development of fourteen first-class hotels, a luxurious conference center, and a cultural center.<sup>38</sup> A significant, although often unspoken, dimension of tourism development in the Philippines involved sex tourism, which had initially developed during the Vietnam War to capture the “rest and recreation” market of the U.S. military. Beginning in

the early 1970s, the Philippines became a popular destination for Japanese men on sex tours.<sup>39</sup> Although prostitution was (and is) not legal in the Philippines, prohibitions against it were rarely enforced, and some have argued that the government in fact tacitly encouraged sex tourism because it brought money into the country.<sup>40</sup> By the end of the 1970s, the number of cocktail lounges in the Philippines where foreign men could purchase sexual services had more than doubled. However, Filipina and Japanese feminists soon began protesting Japanese sex tours.<sup>41</sup> A rally in Manila held by Filipina and Japanese feminists in 1981 drew significant media attention, and the number of Japanese sex tourists to the Philippines soon dropped by 25 percent.<sup>42</sup> As sex tourism to the Philippines declined, Japanese promoters began to recruit Filipina women to work not only in hotels, but also in clubs in Japan. As the Japanese economy had grown, Japanese women had been moving away from work in hostess bars, while Japanese men had more and more money to spend in them. The Japanese government began to issue a growing number of entertainer visas to Filipina women who came to work in hotel bars, cabarets, and hostess bars throughout Japan. Although Filipina women were granted entertainer visas to work as cultural performers, they were often expected to work as hostesses part or all of the time. Bar owners in Japan were rarely held accountable for their employment practices even when they were in clear violation of Filipina women's visa conditions.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, while increasing numbers of Filipina women began to come to Japan on entertainer visas, growing numbers also began to go through underground channels to work in other parts of the sex industry, often as prostitutes and in sex shows. As I later discuss, on account of these convergent trends, Filipina entertainers in Japan came to be popularly associated with sex work.

If the beginning of a trend of documented Filipina migration to Japan to work in hostess bars is identifiable by the late 1970s and early 1980s, it gathered momentum over the 1980s and 1990s. By 1980, the employment situation in the Philippines had grown severe, and the debt crisis had reached a critical point. The IMF and World Bank issued an ultimatum to the Marcos government, calling for a restructuring of the Philippine economy that eventually entailed accepting a structural adjustment loan and further devaluation of the peso in the interest of making the country more profitable and accessible for foreign investment. In the years that followed, these efforts only increased unemployment, poverty, and unequal income distribution.<sup>44</sup> For example, between 1982 and 1985, GDP in the Philippines fell dramatically and, continuing

a trend that had begun in the 1960s, real wages dropped 30 percent.<sup>45</sup> By 1986, real agricultural wages were below three-fourths of what they had been in 1962, and real wages of both skilled and unskilled laborers in urban areas were less than one-third of what they had been.<sup>46</sup> During this time, too, Japanese direct investment in and ODA to the Philippines began to grow, and by 1998 Japan was the single largest donor to the Philippines.<sup>47</sup> These political-economic trends established new linkages between the two countries. As I suggest in the next chapter, they formed a backdrop for Filipina migration to Japan, which began during the Marcos regime and gathered steam during the subsequent Aquino and Ramos administrations.<sup>48</sup>

On account of the converging histories through which a migration niche for Filipina entertainers developed—the blending of stigmatized work in the sex industry with a glamorous and elite performance tradition in the Philippines linked to the world of *showbiz* (show business, Tg.)—many Filipina women in Central Kiso expressed ambivalence about working in Japan. Cherie, a Filipina friend in Tokyo, explained that when small numbers of skilled Filipina/o performers were employed abroad, the work was considered quite prestigious.<sup>49</sup> For example, Cherie described a friend of her uncle's, a beautiful, college-educated office worker in her midtwenties, who impressed Cherie with stories about her experiences performing Filipino cultural dances at elegant hotels and resorts in Japan during the early 1970s. Cherie explained that the image of “dancing in Japan” changed in her mind during the mid-1970s—the height of Japanese sex tourism in the Philippines. Cherie described how soon thereafter promotion agencies in the Philippines that arranged for women to work in bars in Japan “sprouted up overnight, starting up here and there.”

However, links between professional and university cultural dance troupes in the Philippines and Filipina entertainers in Japan remained strong even through the 1980s and 1990s. Filipina women who went to Japan on entertainer visas had to demonstrate they were trained as performers. Professional Filipino folk dancers worked as instructors, promoters, and licensing examiners for these women, and some former cultural dancers used capital acquired through this work to start businesses recruiting Filipina women to train to work in bars. One professional Filipino folk dancer I met, who was at the time a PhD student at an elite university in the United States, told me that he had helped put himself through college in the Philippines by working as an examiner for women going to Japan as entertainers. Moreover, many promoters had at one

time worked as cultural dancers. Cherie recalled that her promoter, who ran one of the largest promotion agencies in the Philippines, had regaled her group with stories about his experiences performing on U.S. bases in Japan, Hawaii, and Guam. He had used the money he saved while performing to start his promotion company.

Because going to Japan as an entertainer was linked to professional Philippine cultural performance, many Filipina women in Central Kiso viewed it as a glamorous and exciting opportunity even while the work became stigmatized and stories circulated in the Philippines about the tragic fates of some Filipina migrants in Japan. Many Filipina women in Central Kiso, who primarily came from urban and rural poor communities, described being treated like celebrities when they were recruited and trained to be entertainers. These women first signed with managers and promotion agencies that arranged their training and paperwork so that they could pass licensing exams as cultural performers and apply for entertainer visas. These agencies often gave the women cash advances to go shopping for clothes and makeup to take abroad. Several women explained that this was the first time they ever had such a luxury. As part of their training, they also had costume fittings and professional makeup applications. They were invited to photo shoots at which professionals took portfolio photographs of them in full costume and makeup under professional lighting. These photos were then sent to Japan by the Philippine promoter. In some ways, going to Japan as an entertainer offered these women an opportunity to live a life imagined only for models or movie stars. In fact, in an effort to “professionalize” (and thereby regulate and capitalize on) this migration trend, the Philippine state encouraged women to view their work in such a light. For example, the *Philchime Career Manual for Overseas Performance Artists*, the standard text used during the early 1990s in the Academic Training Program for Filipina women applying to work in Japan, asserts, “The honor, glamour, and privilege of this profession are only for those who can be considered as talented and beautiful according to standards of show business.”<sup>50</sup>

#### SAMPAGITA

Through the convergence of two discrepant, but related, sets of histories—one of the establishment of hostess bars in Central Kiso and the other of the development of a trend of Filipina migration to Japan—Filipina hostess bars came to offer sites of encounter for Filipina women and Japanese men in the region. In this next section, I illustrate how the contradictory

factors that shaped the development of hostess bars informed not only the capitalist organization of these establishments but also Filipina migrants' and their Japanese customers' ambivalent experiences in them. I'll begin with an evening I spent at a bar I call Sampagita.

Sampagita was a small bar nestled along the road that leads down from the Kisofukushima train station, which is perched on a hill above the town proper. The neon sign identifying the bar had already been turned on when I opened the front door and began to descend the dimly lit stairs that led into the club. The flight was steep and I watched my footing, staring down at the aged, dirty red carpet and working my way around the crates of large, empty bottles of Sapporo beer. It was Ruby's birthday, and I could hear music, a tape of Happy Birthday tunes, filtering through another door at the base of the stairwell. A bell went off as I continued my descent, notifying whoever was in the club that I was about to enter.

Ruby's birthday party marked the first time I had gone unaccompanied to a Filipina hostess bar while it was open for business, and I opened the door to the bar with a mixture of excitement and unease. Kisofukushima was a small town, and I had not yet lived there long. I worried that my landlady and other Japanese residents might question my character if they learned that I was spending time at these clubs. Just a few weeks earlier, I had mentioned to my landlady that I had attended a private gathering at Sampagita—a get-together with Sister Ruth and some Filipina friends and their husbands and children—and she had seemed troubled. As I have mentioned, my landlady was among the elite of the area. She prided herself on coming from and marrying into good local families, families that traced their descent from feudal officials or had historically owned land and important businesses, such as the area's miso shop. She told me that neither she nor anyone she knew had ever entered a Filipina bar. She qualified her comment by explaining that she was not prejudiced against Filipina women as a whole, telling me about a Filipina friend of hers, a "truly lovely person," who had come to Central Kiso through an "*omiai kekkon*," a mediated marriage, as my landlady's own mother and many of that generation had. However, she had maintained that Filipina women employed at clubs were working as prostitutes, and she had rationalized that they must be poor and desperate, as well as *keihaku* (shallow, frivolous, immodest), to do such work. When I had tried to protest, she had asserted that her parents would never have let her take such a job, even if they had been reduced to the direst of circumstances. She cautioned me, "People might think that one was *keihaku* if she associated with Filipinas who worked in bars."

I later learned that many local men, including those working at the town hall and Kiso County government offices, and even on occasion my landlady's assistants and son, sometimes patronized these bars. For many Japanese men in Central Kiso, Filipina clubs were a well integrated, although sometimes concealed, feature of the local social landscape. But my landlady's warning unsettled me, reminding me that many Japanese community members did not perceive these establishments as places for nice, well-bred women, which I—by virtue of my white U.S. Americanness, my education level and university affiliations, and my formal and polite Japanese—had, thus far, been assumed to be. It also painfully reinforced for me the premium placed on one's reputation in the small community and the fact that my actions would reflect not only on me but also on my landlady and her family, to whom I was greatly indebted. Despite myself, I could not help but feel self-conscious every time I entered a hostess bar.

But Ruby's birthday party was a research opportunity. And what was perhaps more important, Ruby considered me a friend, and because of both my status in the community and the low turnout expected at the event, my attendance meant a lot to her and to other Filipina women in the community. It had snowed unexpectedly that afternoon, and because of the weather, several women had to cancel plans at the last minute to come to the party; their husbands would not allow them to drive in the snow. Sorry for their absence, they had stressed the importance of my attendance at the celebration. So I had come bringing a birthday cake—a whipped cream and strawberry shortcake confection bought at a local bakery—and apologies and best wishes from Tessie, Cora, and others.

As I entered the club, Ruby's employees, Victoria, Gina, and Malou, looked up from what they were doing to offer big smiles and call out, "*ir-rashaimase*," the standard, formal Japanese greeting to customers entering a business establishment. "Hello," I cried back, placing the cake and my backpack on the bar and removing my old down jacket, gloves, and scarf. It was nearly eight o'clock and the women were busy preparing the club for the evening ahead. They were wearing jackets over their strapless and sleeveless cocktail dresses, and they had not yet switched into their heels from the clogs and tennis shoes they wore to work. Malou and Gina were rolling up *oshibori* (small moistened hand towels) and placing them in the steamer for customers who were soon to arrive. The women were laughing and discussing a Tagalog soap opera that they had borrowed on video from another friend whose mother had sent it from the Philippines. I interrupted and asked where Ruby was, and they told



me that “Mama,” as they called her, would arrive later. “We are the ones who will clean and set up the bar.”

Sampagita’s facilities were modest. They included the club itself, a small kitchen sectioned off from the main room with colorful curtains, and a tiny washroom and toilet. The club itself was narrow and windowless. Always choked with cigarette smoke, the small, dimly lit space quickly became stuffy during the winter when Ruby turned the heater up high. A long, low bar with chairs curved along the right wall, and behind the bar were glass-doored cupboards filled with bottles of whisky and an assortment of glasses. At the far end of the club sat a small, crescent-shaped stage with a television monitor and a microphone for karaoke performances. The remainder of the space was filled with six short booth-like seats covered in mint green vinyl and three low marble-patterned plastic coffee tables. Neither the booths nor the tables were bolted to the floor, and Ruby was fond of rearranging the furniture and redecorating the club. On several occasions, she enlisted the women working for her, as well as me and several other Filipina friends, to help. We spent hours tacking colorful floral decorations and Philippine fans and flags up on the walls, hanging lace curtains from the Philippines around the stage, and putting up cross-stitched pictures of angels and figures of the Santo Niño.

The stage in Ruby’s bar was too small for her to apply for visas for “talents” (*tarento*), what Japanese promoters and Filipina women often called those who entered Japan on entertainer visas. After 1991, in part as a response to the well-publicized death of a Filipina entertainer named Maricris Sioson and to corresponding protests in the Philippines over the sexual exploitation and abuse of women working in clubs, the Japanese government specified that only bars with stages large enough for cultural performances could qualify to hire foreign workers.<sup>51</sup> Because Ruby could not hire women on entertainer visas, she employed Filipina friends married to Japanese men—at least one-third of Filipina women married to Japanese men in the region continued to work in local bars—and other women who were, in Tagalog, *bilog* or *TNT*, that is, working in Japan without government-issued visas.<sup>52</sup> (As I discuss in greater detail in chapter 6, Filipina women in Japan without visas often find jobs through friends from earlier contract jobs or through relatives married to Japanese men.)

A number of Filipina women married to Japanese men wanted to work in hostess bars because the salaries there were considerably higher than in other work available to them in the region, such as factory work and

piecework. Gina and Malou were two of what some Filipina women in the region referred to as the “lucky” ones, whose Japanese husbands and in-laws permitted them to continue working at night. The women had met their husbands several years back while working at bars in Kisofukushima and Agematsu, respectively. Both had stopped working while their children were young and had recently gone back to jobs in local bars to do *arubaito* (part-time work, Jpn.). Unlike talents, they were paid hourly rather than salaried wages, and they did not live in club-provided housing. Unusual in Central Kiso, Victoria was *TNT* (or, as she joked, an “OW: an OCW [overseas contract worker], without the C, the contract”). Most undocumented Filipina women I met in Japan had stayed beyond the limit of visas that they initially received through a number of routes: jobs as entertainers that they had left because they did not like their work conditions or did not want to return to the Philippines when their visas expired; marriages with Japanese men whom they had left, often while they still had time remaining on temporary spousal visas, which then later expired; or visits paid to immediate relatives legally residing in Japan (one is not legally permitted to work while on a temporary visitor’s visa, but some do anyway).<sup>53</sup>

Victoria had run away from her third contract job because she did not want to return to the Philippines and wait to come back to work in Japan. After a woman’s contract was over, she was required to return to the Philippines and to wait several months before she was rehired and her papers were reprocessed. The eldest daughter, Victoria was the breadwinner in her family, and the loss of income during this hiatus caused her family in the Philippines financial difficulty. Her father had diabetes and she was putting her siblings through college. Without her monthly remittances, her father could not afford insulin and other necessary medications (which are sold, often by drug companies based in the United States, for prices that are relatively astronomical in the Philippines), and her siblings could not afford to remain in school. Moreover, because Victoria no longer had a promoter or manager taking a cut from her salary, her income was significantly higher than when she had worked as a talent—an additional attraction of going *TNT*. However, her situation was also much more precarious, and because of her undocumented status she was vulnerable in ways that many contract workers are not. (Again, see chapter 6 for a more complete discussion of these vulnerabilities.)

The evening of Ruby’s birthday party, the seats at Sampagita were arranged around the tables to form three small private booths. In lieu of the usual Japanese snacks served from the kitchen, a buffet of Filipino



Figure 2. An entire piglet made for the dramatic centerpiece at Ruby's birthday party, March, 1999.

foods was spread along the bar. Ruby had specially prepared *lechon*, Filipino-style roasted pork: an entire piglet with an apple in its mouth formed a dramatic centerpiece for the spread.<sup>54</sup> Accompanying the roast pig were *lumpiang shanghai* (Filipino-style spring rolls), fruit salad in a sweet and heavy mixture of both fresh and whipped cream, a salad smothered with a mayonnaise sauce, and pieces of roast chicken, all of which Ruby, with Victoria's help, had made to serve to her friends and the paying customers she expected that night.

About half an hour after I arrived, just as the women had changed out of their casual shoes and jackets, the bell in the stairwell went off, and a few moments later the first customer entered. He was carrying a large bouquet of red roses wrapped in cellophane, presumably a gift for Ruby, who had yet to appear. The women greeted the man as he came into the bar, and Victoria ushered him into one of the mint green booths. She started talking with him as she finished arranging things, addressing him in Tagalog as *kuya* (big brother) and throwing other Tagalog words, such as *ako* (I) and *ikaw* (you), in with her Japanese. Meanwhile Malou came over with a warm hand towel for the man, and Gina brought him a beer. I made myself a drink and sat down at the bar. Having overheard Victoria and the man's exchange, I asked in Tagalog

if the man understood. “A little,” Victoria replied in Tagalog, turning back to the man and confirming in Japanese, “Right you understand some Tagalog?” “Not really,” he responded in Japanese, looking rather embarrassed to be the focus of attention of so many women and relieved when a few minutes later another customer arrived.

The women sat the second customer at a different booth, and Malou brought him a hot towel and a beer before she joined him at his table. By this time, Victoria had sat down with the first customer, and she was chatting with him and squeezing his face in an affectionate and flirtatious manner. I turned back to Malou and Gina, who were sitting with the second customer in awkward silence. The three looked bored, as if they all were waiting for Ruby’s arrival.

#### THE EVERYDAY PRACTICE OF HOSTESSING

Ruby’s employees helped her clean up the bar after closing and on holidays, and they set up the club before it opened. They rolled hand towels, refilled napkin and toothpick holders, set out ice buckets, washed dishes, wiped down tables, prepared snack foods for customers, refrigerated beer, rearranged furniture and decorations, accompanied Ruby in buying supplies, and periodically vacuumed the carpet and cleaned the toilet and kitchen. Bars that employ foreign women on entertainer visas are required to provide housing for the women they employ, and many in Central Kiso had dorms or apartments that the women also were expected to keep clean. Ruby’s employees also entertained customers at the club by pouring drinks, serving snacks, and making their male customers feel important, welcome, and comfortable. They were responsible for ensuring that customers were satisfied and had fun at the bar by talking, flirting, dancing, and singing with them, and sometimes by performing songs on the karaoke stage.

As I have mentioned, Filipina women on entertainer visas were technically hired as cultural performers, and they were not legally allowed to have sexual relationships with customers. Some bars expressly forbid hostesses from doing so—they had policies calling for immediate dismissal if discovered. Most bars in Central Kiso (at least as far as I was told) did not physically force, or even directly coerce, women to sleep with men. However, like all hostess bars (including those that hired Japanese women), Filipina hostess bars in Central Kiso encouraged Filipina women to develop intimate and affectionate relationships with their male clients so that the men would be inclined to patronize and spend

money at the club. In other words, the bars expected these women to not only perform manual duties, but also, what Arlie Hochschild has called “emotional labor,” to convince clients that the women cared for them and were having a good time so that the men would want to remain at their bar and increase their tabs.<sup>55</sup> This expectation structured not only the capitalist organization of the bars, but also the ways these women understood their jobs and the kinds of relationships that developed between them and Japanese men in Central Kiso.

To encourage the women to please and entertain customers, many Filipina hostess bars instituted quota systems that offered financial incentives, not unlike commissions. One of these was a “drink-back” system in which women received ¥100 (at the time about \$0.88) for every drink a customer ordered above a weekly quota of, say, fifty. If women did not meet their quotas, not only did they not receive any drink-back money, but also they were sometimes penalized. Women developed different strategies to get customers to drink so that they could meet their drink-back quotas. For example, Ruby once explained with pride how she would apply subtle pressure on her customers, encouraging them to get drunk, being attentive to them, and cultivating their affections by making them feel special and cared for in the club.

Drink-back quotas were not the only incentive employed by the bars to encourage the women to develop personal connections with customers. Many bars had a “request” system through which customers could request that specific women sit at their tables and serve them. At these bars, women frequently had request quotas that they had to meet each week; that is, they had to have a certain number of customers request their presence at their tables. A particular woman might be known as the prettiest or most charming woman at a bar and the most popular with customers; this woman was the bar’s number one request for a given period, and she might receive a bonus for this status. Although it was a source of pride for the women to be chosen the number one request, the request system sometimes fostered competition or tension among them. Moreover, Filipina women in Central Kiso sometimes became jealous if they liked a particular customer but he requested another woman.

To maintain relationships with customers and encourage them to patronize a bar and request them, Filipina women working in local bars often called their customers during daytime hours. Many of these women carried cellular phones that enabled them to do this, and they—even those who were married—would frequently get calls from their male customers. I would listen as they joked around with and flattered the men,

asking why the men had taken so long to call, telling the men that they were missed, and encouraging them to come to the bar that night. Some of these relationships extended outside the region and even outside Japan. For example, Filipina women working at bars in Central Kiso sometimes were in contact with men who had visited their bars on business trips. These women would keep track of when the men would be in the area and encourage them to come visit again. Occasionally when a Filipina woman who had come on a six-month entertainer visa returned to a different region of Japan on a new contract, a customer she met at a previous job might travel across the country to pay her a visit. In the Philippines, I met and interviewed a Filipina woman who had been going back and forth between the two countries, working multiple contracts as an entertainer, over the course of several years. Even in Manila (during the course of a two-hour interview), she was receiving calls from admirers in Japan who were anxiously awaiting her return.

In addition to request quotas, many but not all bars had quotas on *dōhan*, which literally means “accompaniment” in Japanese, but in this context referred to dates in which a man took a woman out to dinner or shopping, after which she brought him back to her club. In some cases, men paid the club to take a woman on *dōhan* and women sometimes got a “*dōhan-back*,” or a monetary bonus for each date they went on. One Filipina woman explained in Tagalog that what happened on these dates, “*depende sa babae*” (depends on the woman, varies from woman to woman). She told me that while some Filipina women might be willing to sleep with customers on *dōhan*, she and many Filipina women she knew were not. She clarified that with “ordinary customers” she only went out to dinner or sang karaoke. She told me that she would only ever be physically intimate with a customer, “if he is my boyfriend,” that is, if she trusted him and had some kind of committed relationship with him.

As I mentioned, as the political-economic situation in Japan and the Philippines has worsened, Filipina women working in bars have become more vulnerable. Toward the end of my fieldwork, many lamented that they were increasingly expected to do more to satisfy customers. However, a number of Filipina women in Central Kiso who had worked in bars in the late 1980s and early 1990s when the Japanese economy was peaking and customers had relatively large disposable incomes, and who had felt some degree of security in their jobs and their visa status, described how they used the *dōhan* system to their advantage. When I asked one of these woman how she and other hostesses would get customers to take them on *dōhan*, she laughed and said, “Do you want to

know our technique?” She recounted how she would tell the customer, “Oh, I want to buy such and such, do you know where I can find it?” And the customer would subsequently offer to take her shopping. Not only would he wind up buying her whatever she wanted, but he would also take her out to dinner and then to the club. She also described excitedly how she used to work in Chiba, close to Tokyo Disneyland, and how she would repeatedly tell customers (with feigned naïveté), “I’ve never been to Disneyland.” She laughed as she told me that she had been there many times, but that when a customer took her she didn’t have to pay for anything. Not only would he cover her admission and food, but he would also buy her souvenirs for the club and for herself. Knowing that women could be put in vulnerable positions on these outings, this woman told me that she and her friends would strategically avoid the “*sukebei*” (lecherous men, Jpn.) and asked only the “*majime*” (serious or sincere-intentioned, Jpn.) men or, as another woman put it, those men who could be satisfied “in a simple way.” She added that if she were scared to go out alone with a man for the first time, she would bring one or two other friends from the bar as chaperones.

While these quotas put pressure on Filipina women to financially perform for the bar, they also encouraged women to develop intimate and caretaking relationships with their male customers and, ultimately, to learn to frame some of these relationships in terms of dating, romance, and even love. Many women described going on *dōhan* as fun and even, in some cases, as a form of courtship. One woman said that going on dates with customers who took her out shopping or to *yakiniku* (Japanese-style barbeque) was her favorite part of the job. She waxed nostalgic about her experiences hostessing when the Japanese economy was booming and customers would buy her many expensive gifts. Another Filipina woman in Central Kiso told me that she preferred working at a bar with a *dōhan* system and a kind *mama-san* in lively and cosmopolitan Tokyo to working at those in the countryside that did not have *dōhan* quotas. She boasted that she had been to Mitsukoshi, an expensive department store in Tokyo, on a *dōhan* with a wealthy customer who was smitten with her and had bought her a coat worth more than ¥100,000 (about \$885). He had bought it, she said, because he had wanted her to see her in those kinds of clothes. She told me that when she first came to Japan she didn’t know anything about fashionable restaurants and expensive brand names, like Gucci, Versace, and Louis Vuitton. She soon learned about them from the other Filipina women with whom she worked at clubs, and also from Japanese customers who

took her out on *dōhan* and bought her expensive, brand-name gifts. In this sense, *dōhan* served as an introduction into an elite, cosmopolitan, and bourgeois world that was new and exciting to this woman. Other women shared similar experiences, delighting not only in the gifts received, but also in the flattery of receiving them. These women expressed a sense of pride and accomplishment: expensive gifts symbolized not only one's participation in an elite capitalist world, but also one's popularity with men and one's skill at balancing and manipulating relationships with them.

Some women who had grown up in strict Catholic homes or who did not have money or time to care for their appearance in the Philippines told me that they enjoyed having admirers and receiving attention from men who, unlike the men they had known in the Philippines, had the means to take them out on dates and buy them gifts. Many women spoke with pleasure of the customers who vied for their affection and who wanted to marry them. One described having multiple "boyfriends" (her relations with whom, she reported, had not been sexual) who would take her out. She complained, with a deep sigh, of the difficulties of juggling these men and of staving off their jealousies, "because they know that you have other customers, so [each] one wants to think that he's your favorite." Another woman told me that Japanese men preferred Filipina women to Japanese women because Filipina women were so loving and affectionate; for her, the attention she received from male customers validated her sense of herself as an attractive and caring woman and as a Filipina.

These women's descriptions of the pleasures they found in receiving attentions from customers were only heightened in their discussions of the men they had decided to marry. Most married Filipina women I knew in Central Kiso had begun dating their husbands as part of their jobs, and many of them told romantic and exciting stories about their courtships, describing how their husbands had visited their bars every night and spent vast sums of money to help them avoid the attentions of other men. They spoke of exciting dates in which the men took them out driving and then for expensive dinners. Some of these women told stories of "love at first sight," describing how they had fallen for their husbands the minute the men had walked into the clubs where they worked and how they had maneuvered around the rules of their club, which usually allow only male customers to select hostesses, to arrange to sit with the men who became their husbands. Other Filipina women told me that, while they had not initially been romantically interested in their husbands,



they had grown to have feelings for these men because they were so kind and persistent in their attentions.

In addition to the pleasures these women found in some of their interactions with male customers, Filipina women in Central Kiso also derived great satisfaction from their paychecks, sums of money that would have taken them years to accumulate in the Philippines and that enabled them to present themselves as dutiful daughters and responsible sisters, nieces, mothers, and friends to those back home. These women used their paychecks in a variety of ways. They purchased lots and built homes in the Philippines; bought jeepneys and opened *sari-sari* (general) stores; put siblings, nieces, or children through school; lavished expensive brand-name gifts on their friends and their families; treated friends and family members to meals at special restaurants when they went home; or simply, as Marites explained in Tagalog, used the money “for becoming beautiful” (*pagpapaganda*)—to color their hair, purchase jewelry, and keep up with the latest makeup and fashions.

In fact, many Filipina women who had worked in local bars suggested that becoming beautiful was an exciting part of a hostess’s job.<sup>56</sup> Married Filipina women in the region often displayed photographs in their homes of themselves dressed up and striking glamorous—and sometimes seductive—poses while at work in hostess bars. One day Victoria brought in a roll of photos she had taken of herself and her friends at a club in another prefecture where she had recently been employed. She proudly displayed photograph after photograph of herself in different outfits, lounging in booths, singing karaoke, and posing, like a fashion model, with friends. Many Filipina women in the region also enjoyed singing karaoke and took pride in their skill and talent, performing hits from U.S. American and Filipina artists: Mariah Carey, Celine Dion, Lea Salonga, and ZsaZsa Padilla. As I mentioned earlier, when Filipina women came to Japan as talents they were hired as either singers or dancers. Competition to be a singer was fierce, and other women recognized those selected as singers as quite talented. For women in the Philippines with dreams of being professional performers, singing in clubs in Japan provided an opportunity to achieve some degree of celebrity. Even when customers were not around, these women would pay to use the karaoke box, singing solos, duets, and group numbers, applauding and encouraging each other, and acknowledging those women who were especially skillful performers.

Filipina hostess bars also provided spaces where Filipina women could exercise their entrepreneurial skills. One Filipina woman married to a man in a nearby village started a business giving facials to other

women working at bars. Another sold fashionable hostessing outfits on commission. I remember one evening, before the club had opened for the night, when Rose appeared with a large plastic bag and started pulling clothes from it. An array of colorful outfits appeared—turquoise and purple miniskirts paired with jackets fastened by rhinestone-studded buttons; long red skirt-and-top sets in stretch rayon; shimmering gold and magenta evening dresses; and fitted black spandex tank tops covered with long pieces of black netting to wear over then fashionably bell-bottom, snakeskin-print pants. All the women were excited, taking the outfits from the bag one by one in their plastic covers and laying them on the booths to look at them. Victoria and Gina immediately selected outfits they liked and began trying them on in the bar, pulling the tops carefully over their heads so as not to smudge their makeup. Then they ran into the bathroom to see how they looked, while Rose yelled after them, “They’re all made in Korea,” a point of prestige.

In all of these ways, working in Filipina hostess bars made many Filipina women feel to some degree empowered as it shaped the ways that these women learned to relate to Japanese men, the forms of intimacy that they developed with their male customers, and ways these women came to understand these relationships. However, at the same time that hostess bars created opportunities for Filipina women to feel glamorous, fashionable, desirable, and in control of their relationships with customers, their work in these establishments was also based in deep political-economic inequalities between them and their Japanese customers, and also placed them in many vulnerable and undesirable positions as women.

Filipina women who had worked at bars in Central Kiso consistently said that their least favorite part of the job involved dealing with men who were lecherous, especially when they got drunk. These women distinguished between “*sukebei*” and men who were “respectful,” those (often relatively few men) who were polite and treated the women like people, not sexual objects. They shared how they would deal with lecherous customers who tried to grope them, either by politely telling the men that they were not that kind of woman or simply by saying that they did not like being touched. A few of these women said that when customers groped them they would respond by boldly grabbing the man’s genitals, which caused the man to recoil in shock. However, these women also recognized that a woman’s ability to maintain boundaries with customers depended both on her willingness to speak out and the support she could expect to receive from her bar management for a refusal.

Problems with lecherous customers were magnified when it came to *dōhan*. A number of Filipina women in Central Kiso suggested that going on *dōhan* could be risky, but if they had to meet a *dōhan* quota they had little choice in the matter. Moreover, the burden of getting a man to go on *dōhan* was on them. Some women relayed stories of friends who were raped when they went out on *dōhan*. Others spoke of consoling friends who were pressured into having sex with customers and were ashamed or distraught afterward. *Dōhan* was often riskiest for women who were undocumented. However, it was also risky for those on entertainer visas. In many ways, a Filipina woman's job requirements depended on the expectations of her *mama-san* or bar owner, who varied in their treatment of these women. If a Filipina woman did not have the support of her bar management, or if she were financially vulnerable (as most of these women, who were supporting their families in the Philippines, were to a range of degrees), she could easily find herself in uncomfortable or dangerous situations. As a result, the very pleasures women derived from *dōhan* and from meeting quotas and being chosen as the number one request were also linked to their vulnerability as Filipina migrant laborers in Japan (and particularly to the limited—if any—assistance and protection the Japanese government offered them) and to anxiety surrounding the lack of complete control they had in these situations over what happened to their bodies.

Moreover, the excitement of articulating oneself as a glamorous, sexually attractive, successful, and cosmopolitan woman in bars was also tempered by these women's self-conscious feelings of anxiety and shame that bar work was immoral. The overwhelming majority of Filipina women in Central Kiso were Catholic, and religious ideas about women's sexuality informed how they viewed bar work. A number of Filipina women in Central Kiso told me that they had cried when they first came to Japan and learned what their jobs would actually entail. Even after working for many years in these bars, Filipina women in Central Kiso expressed reservations about the work.

For example, one evening before *Sampagita* opened, I stopped by to visit Elsa, Rose, and Victoria. The preparations for the night were complete, and we chatted as we waited for customers to arrive. I happened to notice that the statues of the *Santo Niño* decorating the bar had been moved to a new, more prominent spot, and that led me to ask if the statues were there to protect the bar. Elsa, who spoke English with confidence, explained that, no, the images were for decoration, "to remind us that God is with us." She added that, for protection, prayer was more important than images. She then expressed reservations about having the statues in

the bar at all. "When I first came I didn't think that it was good they had them," she said, "It's like mocking God to have them in a place like this. I'm embarrassed to the Lord." Rose, who had been listening to our conversation, began to discuss her feelings with Elsa in Tagalog. She said that she too felt that "it's a sin to work in a place like this," and that she too was "embarrassed in front of God." Then Elsa started to assert in Tagalog that what was really important was having a pure heart. Anyone could go to church and go through the motions of praying, but God could see what was underneath; God knew if one's heart was pure. While Elsa and Victoria went to the bathroom to freshen up, I asked Rose what she thought. Rose had initially come to Japan as a drummer in a band. Now married to a Japanese man with a job in a construction company, she worked at a semiconductor factory during the day and occasionally at bars at night. She repeated, this time in a mix of Japanese and English, that she thought working in a bar was a sin. "Do you feel guilty about it?" I asked. "Not guilty," she maintained, "just embarrassed in front of God." "But," she added hesitantly, "it's OK to work in a place like this if you have a good reason." For example, she explained, more than 50 percent of her salary went to her family in the Philippines; that justified her working in a club. All three of the women agreed that one could justify working in a club if she were doing so for her family as opposed to for selfish reasons, for example just for oneself or to buy oneself expensive things.

#### RUBY'S ENTRANCE, OR THE PLEASURES AND CHALLENGES OF BEING MAMA-SAN

Ruby was known for being late, but on the night of her birthday she was uncharacteristically prompt. At exactly nine o'clock the bell in the stairwell went off, notifying us that someone was about to enter the club. A few moments later, the door to the bar slowly opened and Ruby made a grand entrance, pausing in the doorway for a moment with her left hand on her hip until she had captured our attention. Ruby was a vision in pink. She had told me a few days earlier that she had bought a new dress in Shiojiri for the party, but she had refused to describe it, telling me that it would be a big surprise. She was correct. Ruby, notorious for her flashy and outrageous clothing among other disapproving and embarrassed Filipina women in the region, had outdone herself that night in a floor-length, skin-tight, cotton candy pink, stretch-lace strapless gown with a ruffled pink lace choker attached to a revealing bustier top with four strands of white pearls that offset her cleavage. Beauty contests have a



Figure 3. Statues of the Santo Niños decorated Ruby's bar, October, 1999.

long and celebrated history in the Philippines, and I could not help but think that Ruby had crowned herself the queen of her own private pageant.<sup>57</sup> She sashayed into the club as we all watched, spellbound, and then she began her rounds. Her lips stretched into a wide smile as she approached the customer who had brought her the roses, now resting on the booth beside him. Greeting the man warmly with a hug, she accepted the flowers, cradling them regally in her arm. She then greeted the other customer, and finally me, thanking us graciously for coming to her party. An impromptu photo shoot followed. Ruby designated me photographer, insisting that I provide her with copies so that she could remember the night. She and the other women gathered together, striking a series of dramatic poses. Then Ruby put down her flowers and returned to her customers, taking turns talking with and attending to each, until she finally sat down with the one who had brought her the roses, drawing her body close to his as he draped his arm gently around her back.

For Ruby, Sampagita was a place where she could be a glamorous host. She liked being in charge and running her own business, and she enjoyed the prestige and status that went along with being the boss. She described the role of a *mama-san* as being “the leader of the bar,” and “like the owner of the shop.” According to Ruby, the primary difference between working as a *mama-san* and working as a hostess was that as a *mama-san* she was responsible for looking after all customers, even if they were not her own. She had to circulate through the bar, making sure that all customers were satisfied, and assist her hostesses in increasing customers’ tabs. When I asked her why she had become a *mama-san*, she complained about working in bars run by Japanese women, grumbling about the constraints put on her: “When I was a talent it was really terrible. I had to listen to everything the *mama* said. ‘Don’t smoke around the customers. You have to sit properly, like this.’ They have rules for everything,” she said. She also complained about her drink-back quota. “In a week it’s up to fifty, and if you don’t hit it, you don’t get a ¥100 per drink. For example, if you get forty-nine that’s not enough, just by one, and then you don’t get your bonus.” Ruby explained that her frustration with the exploitation of her labor eventually drove her to open her own club: “When I was at Fantasy [the bar where she had been working] I really worked hard at my job. I had a lot of customers. I tried as hard as I could, but only the *mama* made money. I didn’t make money, that’s how I felt. For example, even if I had a lot of customers come, I went around, right, getting customers to drink. If they ordered a lot the *mama* of Fantasy really made a lot of money . . . but my salary, it wasn’t that big. My hard work wasn’t reflected in my salary.” Ruby also complained that her *mama-san* had expected her to pay penalties for infractions that Ruby had felt were unjustified. It was at that point that Ruby had started to think about taking customers from that club and opening her own place.

Being a *mama-san* was one of the few jobs, apart from factory work, piecework, and hostessing, available to Filipina women in Central Kiso, and it was the only one of these that allowed women some degree of control over their labor. For Ruby and other women, who often spoke of their dreams of starting their own business, being a *mama-san* was a way to achieve these dreams and to access money and power. However, the knowledge of Japanese business law and the considerable bureaucracy and paperwork entailed in opening a bar in Japan, to say nothing of the capital needed, made it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for most Filipina women to start a business without the assistance of a Japanese partner. The majority of Filipina *mama-sans* thus attained their position through

one of two methods: by marrying a Japanese man who already ran a club (often the owner of the club where she had worked as a talent), or by marrying a Japanese man and opening the bar together with him. In some of these latter cases, a Filipina woman might convince her husband to open the bar for her. Ruby's case was rather unusual among Filipina women but more common among Japanese women working in bars: she had opened her bar with the assistance of not a husband but a wealthy patron.<sup>58</sup> (I introduce Ruby's patron, Suzuki-san, later in the chapter.)

Among some Filipina women in Central Kiso, Ruby was known to be a generous and fun mama-san, especially when her club was doing well financially, and she invited friends to come for drinks or private parties. Her position offered her the latitude to use her bar for personal events. Although Ruby's birthday party was the first time I had gone unaccompanied to her club when it was open for business, it was neither the first nor the last social gathering that I attended at Sampagita. Ruby not infrequently held private birthday, New Year's, and good-bye parties there, including my own video-taped *sayonara* party, when after nearly two years of fieldwork I left Japan. As the economy worsened and customers became fewer and farther between, Sampagita became a setting for friendly get-togethers or just hanging out. The bar was also sometimes a site of social dramas, such as the public (and sometimes alcohol-fueled) arguments between Ruby and her employees, that created scandalous waves of gossip within the Filipina community.<sup>59</sup> Once, when other spaces were unavailable, I even attended a Catholic Mass there. Father Art, a Filipino priest and activist living Nagoya, led services from behind the bar, his white sacerdotal robes set off against a backdrop of highball glasses and Suntory whisky. Depending on the time of day and the occasion, my Filipina friends would sometimes bring their children, and occasionally their husbands. The children would sing karaoke and run around playing hide-and-seek behind the booths; it was always a fight to get them home to bed. There was usually food, sometimes beer, and always music and dancing.

Her recognized hospitality and generosity notwithstanding, Ruby was controversial among other Filipina women in the region for the ways she managed her interpersonal relationships, her business, and her life. Ruby was ambitious. She played by her own rules, sometimes to her advantage and sometimes to her peril. Many Filipina women disapproved of the way that she lived her life, from the choices she made regarding her business, her child, and her marriage to the clothing she wore and the amount she drank. Ruby enjoyed drinking and flirting, and she frequently



Figure 4. Once, when other spaces were unavailable, Mass was held at Ruby's bar, April, 1999.

got herself into trouble on account of both. She also enjoyed shopping at discount stores in the nearest cities and wearing bright red lipstick, long painted fingernails, and tight and revealing outfits with large designer logos (which few women in Central Kiso wore at the time). She was known for making insensitive comments to other Filipina women, usually when she was drunk, and to her distress and sometimes indignation (for she rarely saw herself as in any way responsible for her interpersonal problems), she frequently found herself at the center of fights or gossip. Rumors spread that when business was slow Ruby employed unethical and “immoral” business practices, such as overcharging customers, shortchanging her staff, and engaging in prostitution. A number of Filipina women in Central Kiso told me that they thought she took things too far. They worried especially that her actions would reflect poorly upon all Filipina women in the area. These women were embarrassed by Ruby's irreverent and promiscuous behavior, bawdy comments, and flashy appearance.

Ruby was not the only controversial Filipina *mama-san* in town. Many Filipina women complained about other Filipina *mama-sans* in the region as well, asserting that these women forgot that they were “Filipina”



and acted like they were above others (*nagmamalaki*, Tg.). For example, another *mama-san* was notorious for being “haughty” (*mayabang*, Tg.), abusing her power, and acting like she was superior to other Filipina women simply because she was in a position of authority. One Filipina friend in Central Kiso described how she had been spited and bullied by this *mama-san* on numerous occasions when she was working in her bar. The *mama-san* had singled this woman out for not properly saying “good morning” in Japanese and had embarrassed her in front of the group by forcing her to apologize. She had also refused to let this woman sit with a certain customer, pulling and tearing her costume to get her to move and then fining her for the damaged article. The woman recounted how she had finally stood up to the *mama-san*, saying in Japanese, “You and I, we’re the same. You think about where you came from!” She angrily explained that in her opinion some Filipina *mama-sans* “just want to be boss so that they can look important.”

Filipina *mama-sans* were frequently subjects of gossip and scrutiny within the Filipina community in Central Kiso. Often rumors spread that these women were abused by their husbands, squandered their money at pachinko, were alcoholics, or had philandering husbands. (Some of these rumors were true.) In regard to this gossip, one Filipina woman told me with regret that Filipina women in Japan have a “*talangka* mentality” (crab mentality, Tg. with Eng.): Like crabs, they try to pull down those who climb to the top of the fisherman’s basket. However, while some Filipina women in the region may have been jealous of the status and authority Filipina *mama-sans* had, others did not envy the stress and difficulty of their lives—to them, being a *mama-san* was in no way worth the abuse and troubles many of these women faced.

#### MANLY DESIRES

Suzuki-san was Ruby’s business partner. A *sararīman* (literally, salary man; white-collar worker, Jpn.) at a construction company based in the area, he had sold off his retirement plan to bankroll Sampagita and make Ruby a *mama-san*. Suzuki-san was also rumored to be Ruby’s boyfriend and the cause of her separation from her husband. A short, stocky man with thick and wavy cropped hair, he was wearing a navy blue suit and a boldly patterned red and yellow silk tie when I met him during Ruby’s birthday party. That evening, Ruby asked me to keep Suzuki-san company while she tended to her customers. So I asked if he was open to an interview, a prospect that he welcomed.

“Well, I’m interested in how and why so many Filipina women have come to Central Kiso,” I prompted in Japanese, poisoning my pen for his response.

“Business,” he brusquely responded, “There aren’t any jobs in the Philippines. Filipinas will do anything to work in Japan.”

“But why is there a demand for Filipina workers in the region?” I pressed.

“During the bubble,” Suzuki-san replied matter-of-factly, “new jobs opened up for Japanese women in Japan. They left hostessing, leaving a gap that Filipinas inevitably filled. Naturally, Japanese women are better. But Japanese women have become very scarce.” Suzuki-san’s explanation flowed seamlessly into a commentary on the exodus of Japanese women from rural areas and local men’s interests in Filipina clubs. “In the countryside there is the problem of the bride shortage. This is why Japanese men have turned toward Filipinas. It is a common point all over the world that people want a partner. Now there are many Filipinas married to Japanese men in the area.” This, he rationalized, was because of the large number of women who had come to work in bars.

“But how did Filipina women first come to this area?” I asked. At the time, I was still trying to piece together a history of Filipina bars in the region.

“There haven’t been Filipinas in Kiso for very long. It’s just recently that a large number have been coming,” he explained.

“Why?” I pressed.

Suzuki-san restated his point: “Kiso is *inaka* [the countryside]. A time ago there were many Japanese hostesses here, but they went away. Economic times are hard now, so many people are unemployed, but a little while ago, during the bubble, there were jobs everywhere, so Japanese women opted for those instead of hostessing. There are hardly any Japanese hostesses left. A while back brokers came and introduced Filipinas to places throughout Nagano. There wasn’t any other choice but to have them come.”

As I discussed earlier, Allison has suggested that in hostess bars Japanese men are not paying for sex but to be made to feel like powerful and desirable men. She demonstrates that hostess bars play an important role in constructing a certain kind of masculine subjectivity in Japan: that of a powerful male who can buy a woman to serve him. Allison’s conclusions are based on her fieldwork in an elite hostess bar in Tokyo. She describes how, for urban Japanese white-collar men who are emas-

culated in their work environments, hostess bars are important sites for rearticulating masculine and class-based identities. However, Allison also cites a union organizer who explains that cheap cabarets and other forms of *mizu shōbai* entertainment are popular among blue-collar workers in part because “they see the big dignitaries on the nights of important union meetings indulging” in the pleasures provided at these places.<sup>60</sup> She explains that as hostess bars catering to lower paid workers have become widespread throughout Japan, they have become places where “everyman” can come to be made to feel like an important, powerful man.

I would add that the ways Japanese men in Central Kiso experienced hostess bars were shaped not only by class but also nationality and geography. Beginning in the 1960s and through at least the early 1990s, the figure of the *sarariman*—the middle-class and usually urban white-collar worker—came to define modern Japanese masculinity. A few men who dated or married Filipina women in Central Kiso had white-collar jobs or owned businesses (a green grocery, a soba restaurant, a construction company). However, as I mentioned, most of them worked in construction or at pachinko parlors or bars. All of these men lived in a politically and economically marginalized region of rural Japan. Moreover, many Filipina women’s husbands were ten to twenty-five years older than them and past the *tekireiki* (the “suitable age for marriage,” Jpn.), when they met the women they married. These men hardly fit privileged images of masculinity in Japan.

Filipina hostess bars offered these men opportunities to articulate an elite, class-based form of Japanese masculinity, regardless of the fact that they lived in a peripheral region of Japan and, in many cases, did low-status work. Moreover, these bars enabled the men to feel worldly and important by exposing them to a foreign culture that they viewed as inferior to their own. Consider how Suzuki-san positioned himself as an authority on both Filipina and Japanese women—a competent judge of their class and quality. In doing so, he also suggested that he was an expert on Filipino and Japanese cultures. Moreover, by describing Filipina women as inferior to Japanese women (“Naturally, Japanese women are better”) and thus less desirable, he asserted Japan’s superiority to the Philippines and presented himself as cultivated, wealthy, and powerful on account of his self-identification as a “Japanese man.” In these bars, these men could feel superior on account of both their masculinity *and* their Japaneseness. They could identify as Japanese men who possessed the knowledge and the standards by which national cultures could

be evaluated, the wealth and power to pay for Filipina women's services, and the global vision to enjoy them.

The ways that Filipina hostess bars made Central Kiso men feel like worldly, wealthy, superior, modern, and elite Japanese men, may have in fact contributed to why some men found Filipina women working in bars appealing girlfriends and wives. Recall Tanaka-san's comments (discussed in the introduction to part 1) regarding why he decided to marry his Filipina wife. Like Tanaka-san, a number of Filipina women's husbands in Central Kiso said that they were attracted to Filipina women because these women "came from a poor country," and thus were "submissive" and had "the good qualities that Japanese women have lost." Moreover, as I suggested, in these bars Filipina women learned to please and accommodate their Japanese customers, serving them drinks and food, encouraging them in their jobs, flattering them, and being affectionate with them. These qualities may have also made the women appealing as potential spouses. Of course, not all husbands of Filipina women expressed such sentiments. One man spoke of the deep respect and affection he felt for his wife, explaining that, unlike other couples, they were not simply physically but also spiritually bonded.<sup>61</sup> Another told me he was looking for someone who he felt would be "a good partner." However, like Tanaka-san, a number of these men were looking for marriages with women whom they believed (not necessarily accurately) they could control or would be dependent on them.

However, while these articulations of Japanese masculinity seemed to add to a man's stature, they also revealed local men's self-consciousness of their marginality relative to white-collar men in urban regions of Japan. Like Suzuki-san, many men in Central Kiso described Filipina women who worked at local bars as less desirable than Japanese women and even less attractive than Filipina women in Tokyo. When I asked one local man, who boasted that he both frequented local Filipina bars and made annual trips to the Philippines to play golf and patronize bars there, why men in the area liked Filipina women, he responded abruptly, "They don't." He explained that there weren't any bars with Japanese women in town; Filipina hostess bars were the only option. The men did not have a choice. This man asserted that he regularly went to the Philippines and had been exposed to many Filipina women. In fact, he explained, on account of the fact that Kiso was in the countryside, the Filipina women at local bars were ugly when compared with those he had met at bars in Tokyo. I asked this man why, then, were there so many successful Filipina clubs in town? The man explained that Kisofukushima was just

a small town, implying that there was little else to do but visit bars. Then he added that the Filipina women employed at these bars come and go every six months, and therefore the women were always “fresh” (*furesshu*). When prodded, he also told me that Filipina women had a reputation among Japanese men for being cute and sexy; they were known for having attractive figures and long legs, in particular. Moreover, he added, these days, their dark skin was considered fashionable and sexy. He mentioned a trend in urban areas in Japan in which different groups of young (often high school-aged) women frequented tanning salons or used creams to darken their skin.<sup>62</sup>

Similarly, Suzuki-san told me that hostess bars began hiring Filipina women in Kiso because “there wasn’t any other choice but to have them come.” He explained that during Japan’s economic bubble, Japanese women had opted to leave jobs at hostess bars in the area to find better jobs in cities. Suzuki-san also connected this trend to the “bride shortage,” the absence of Japanese women interested in marrying local men. He suggested that in both of these cases, modernization had made men in Central Kiso undesirable patrons and husbands for Japanese women and forced these men to turn to Filipina women.

In saying that Filipina women had inevitably replaced Japanese women in local bars, these men could not separate their assertions of cosmopolitan masculinity tied to Japanese modernity and affluence from their sensitivity to the region’s marginality vis-à-vis places like Tokyo. Just as Filipina bars were places where rural and blue-collar men could be made to feel like cosmopolitan, desirable, and affluent Japanese men, these men’s experiences in these bars rested upon the fact that rural and working-class men were in fact considered undesirable partners by urban (and sometimes local) Japanese women in part because of their occupation and geographic location. Most patrons of the Tokyo bar that Allison describes were married, and few of the elite men who patronized such establishments would have considered marrying a Japanese woman who had worked in a hostess bar. In contrast, I was told that many Japanese men in rural areas had few marriage prospects outside the bars. Japanese residents in Central Kiso viewed Filipina women as available to men from a “wealthy” and “modern” country like Japan. Thus local men’s assertions of their masculinity in these bars were also shaped by their self-consciousness regarding the region’s positioning within Japan, and specifically the ways that the very political-economic processes that contributed to the establishment of hostess bars in Central Kiso have marginalized people there. I return to this point in chapter 3. Here, however,

I want to suggest that, for both Japanese customers and Filipina migrants, the contradictions and ambivalences through which these bars developed prompted unexpected outcomes.

#### ON BARS AND MARRIAGE

Although attitudes among young people in Japan have recently been changing, for many years social adulthood was believed to begin with marriage.<sup>63</sup> Men in Central Kiso faced considerable social pressure to marry before hitting an age ceiling (which at one time was thirty but has been gradually inching upward). Some local residents told me that an unmarried man over the age of thirty-five seemed irresponsible, as if he were unwilling to take on the responsibility of a wife and children. Others said that if a man was still unmarried in his late thirties, people began to suspect that “something was wrong with him.” One young woman told me that men in the region felt pressure to marry so that others would not think they were “gay” (*gei*), suggesting prevalent homophobic attitudes in the area. My friend Tessie’s husband’s cousin maintained one evening during a casual dinner at his home that marriage was an obligation, not a choice.

Although I was told that in the past local men had rarely married Japanese women who worked in local hostess clubs, in the 1980s and 1990s Filipina hostess bars became places where a number of men in Central Kiso came to find companionship, potential girlfriends and wives, and in some cases romance and love. For example, one Filipina friend told me that her husband’s brother had spent a lot of time at a local bar because, seeing how well his brother’s marriage to her had turned out, he too had been “looking for a Filipina” to marry. In fact, a number of men in the region attended Filipina clubs expressly in search of a spouse.

Although Filipina women in Central Kiso told me that they had not planned to marry a Japanese man when they first came to Japan as an entertainer, these women soon learned that some of their Japanese customers might be looking for serious relationships. Moreover, as I have suggested, courtship, romance, and love became important frameworks through which many of these women learned to make sense of their relationships with men they met in hostess bars.<sup>64</sup> Many Filipina women described how their husbands had courted them while they worked in bars, and how their feelings of affection for these men had grown, in part because of the men’s persistence. As I later discuss, for many of these women, marrying a Japanese man offered new opportunities for both

fulfilling dreams of romance and family, and crafting socially legitimate lives and selves in Japan.

As sites of encounter, then, these bars were more than capitalist spaces of labor and consumption. Rather, they were spaces where differently situated agendas and forms of desire came together through the intimacies of everyday practice, creating new possibilities and constraints for Filipina migrants and Japanese men in Central Kiso. These bars became such spaces on account of the overlaps and gaps that formed as histories of cultural dance performance and sex tourism in the Philippines converged with those through which hostess bars have developed, rural areas have been marginalized, and rural women's desires for their lives have changed in Japan. The coming together of these histories shaped Filipina women's and their Japanese customers' ambivalent and unequal experiences in these bars. For Filipina women, hostess bars offered worlds both of shame and anxiety and of glamour and possibility. These women felt vulnerable and exploited in these bars; however, they also sometimes felt clever, glamorous, and desirable. Similarly, just as these bars reminded local Japanese men of their exclusions from dominant discourses of modern Japanese masculinity that centered on participation in urban, white-collar, and middle-class worlds, they offered these men new opportunities to feel like worldly, affluent, modern, and powerful Japanese men. In this sense, these bars offered important spaces in which different historically shaped experiences and forms of desire came into unequal and productive relations. Marriages between Filipina migrants and Central Kiso men were one form these relations took.