

DISCUSSION

by **Emely Dicolen-Abagat**

Good morning everyone! Allow me to thank our speaker, Mrs. Son, for giving us a very comprehensive presentation on the topic: *“Shifting the Focus on the Kopino Phenomenon: Contexts, Misconceptions, and Spatial Reform.”*

Our presenter brought us to the history of the presence of Koreans in our country, particularly on marriages between Koreans and Filipinas which dated back early 1990s and the rise of what we call the Kopino phenomenon which started to be heard of in 2005. Mrs. Son also enlightened us on the different meanings accorded to the word Kopino. One striking fact, however, is that there have been no hard data/figure/statistics on the exact number of Kopino children in the whole country. Media, government and non-government organizations, and private entities have just been talking about purely approximations.

I would like to ask the opinion of our speaker, *“Why is it, that even after 10 years since the phenomenon on Kopino emerged, the exact number is still unknown? I know for a fact that there have been attempts, but to no avail. Is it because of the lack of funding to do the documentation? Is it because of the lack of commitment, on the part of the Philippine government, Korean government, and private sectors? Is it because of the attitude of the Filipino mothers towards their situation that’s keeping them from coming out in the open? Is it the acceptance of the society?”*

I asked this question because I personally believe that only a comprehensive research could give us a database and will erase all speculations about the Kopino situation, issues, and concerns. It will also give all sectors a basis to come up with concerted efforts and programs to collectively respond to the needs of the Kopino children and mothers. Unless concerned groups who are acting individually do not put all their efforts together, form one common goal and vision, map out uniform and integrated strategies to solve Kopino-related issues, and work with only one mind set, all energies will be put to waste.

Our presenter also made us understand some historical facts that contribute to the *“pure blood”* mentality of Koreans starting from the Koreans’ “Hwan Yang Nyeon” experience, to the Vietnamese “Lai Dai Han,” the “twi-gi,” up until the current which is the period of “multiculturalism” in South Korea. The explanation personally gave me more room for understanding and consideration for Koreans’ difficulty in accepting a multicultural society. Though as mentioned, Koreans have begun to change their attitude towards foreigners, I have this uncomfortable feeling and question, *“What exactly about their ‘attitude’ that changed?” “Is it really ‘multiculturalism’ in the truest sense of the word that Koreans would like to promote, or is it simply ‘assimilation’ of culture?”*

I am quite disturbed with what our speaker mentioned that “Multiculturalism in Korea in mid 2000s was not meant for integration of people of diverse cultures with the Korean society. It was purely ‘utilitarian’ so that foreign migrant workers who were labeled ‘trainees’ fill the 3D jobs that Koreans dislike.... on inviting more foreigners to address the concern about the low fertility rate. Conformity instead of

social integration to the Korean majority and to ‘Koreanize’ all foreigners is the actual reality.” *What exactly can we do to change this mentality and bring it to the level of a more humane and justifiable cause?*

In Mrs. Son’s presentation, she made mention that the media, particularly the Korean media was powerful in projecting a bad image of the Filipinas involved in relationships with Korean men. This happens, I believe, because they base their information on isolated cases and they come up with their own conclusions to draw viewership in an exaggerated, biased manner.

To balance the negative projection of the Korean media about Kopino, Philippine media also have to be more aggressive in producing positive, data-based information about the real context of Kopino in the Philippines. Responsible media should be practiced by both countries.

I totally agree with the presenter, and the KCAI’s advocacy, that the education of these Kopino children is one of the key solutions that will change all the prejudices against them. But the big question is, *“Who is responsible for their education?”* *What circumstances will make them famous so that Korea will accept them as Koreans?”*

I personally have met some of these children at the KCAI and I have heard them share the desires of their hearts to meet their father, I have heard them share their dreams, their ambitions and aspirations, I have seen their talents and skills, I have hugged them, and I have cried with them. They have much to offer both the Korean and Philippine society, they have much to share to the world.

I share Mrs. Son's vision that the economic and prestigious accomplishments of this generation of Kopinos will lead to further acceptance. The day will come when Kopinos will no longer be bullied, no longer be considered to be an embarrassment to the Korean society, that day when they can proclaim their Koreanness and Filipinoness identity confidently without any fear of rejection and embarrassment.

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She was the Education Committee Chairperson of the Archdiocesan Pastoral Center for Filipino Migrants, Hyehwadong Filipino Catholic Community (HFCC) in Seoul. She was awarded as one of the Outstanding Filipinos Overseas in 2010 by the President of the Republic of the Philippines, chosen as one of the Outstanding Filipino Community Leaders in Korea, and one of the 100 Top Alumni of the College of the Holy Spirit, Manila, Philippines, Education Category, during the school's centennial year.

Currently, she is the President of the Association of Filipino Educators in Korea (AFEK), and one of the advisers of the Pinoy Iskolars of Korea (PIKO), and the Filipino EPS Workers Association (FEWA).

Prior to going to Korea, she was a concurrent Dean of two departments, the Graduate School and the Arts and Sciences Department of Colegio de San Juan de Letran Calamba. She was Theology Area Chairperson of the College of the Holy Spirit Manila, her Alma Mater.

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