

[PAPER 2]

Labor Beyond Retirement: Korean Retiree Migrants in the Philippines

by Dohye Kim¹

Abstract

This paper aims to discuss how people “practice” retirement when it is impossible to fulfill the retirement ideal of stop working in their own country by studying Korean retirees in the Philippines. Spurred by Korea’s neoliberal economic transformations and Filipino’s policy promotion to attract foreign retirees, the number of Korean retirees in the Philippines has been dramatically increased since mid-2000s. Most Korean retirees in the Philippines are relatively young -- largely in their 50s and early 60s—and financially insecure to become, what they call “pure retirees,” those who can stop working entirely. Thus, they need to engage in income earning activities through various self-employment businesses in the Philippines. Through ethnographic field research in Korean populated cities in the Philippines, this paper seeks to highlight how these retirees are in inevitable conditions to engage in diverse forms of labor – physical, emotional and moral – in the Philippines. Rather than assuming retirement as one-time life event, this research focuses on how people with lack of national and corporate welfare in late-industrialized countries, such as Korea, struggle to achieve the goal of becoming retirees through new ideas of retirement in another country.

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Ms. Dohye Kim is a PhD candidate in anthropology at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Before starting her PhD program, she completed her MA in Korea University and worked two different Seoul-based NGOs for more than five years. Specifically, she worked for youth with migrant backgrounds including North Korean refugees and children of migrant laborers in Korea. Now based in Manila, she conducts her ethnographic field research on Korean retirees in the Philippines. Beyond the conventional understanding on retirement as a one-time life event, she tries to highlight how the concept of retirement has become a processual one as a result of economic turbulence, in particular in the context of late-industrialized countries, which did not experience the Fordist mode of mass production and national welfare.