

SYNTHESIS

by **Alona Guevarra**

Ask a South Korean what she or he knows about the Philippines and one of the most definite answers one would give would be the beaches—think Boracay! If you probe a bit more, after getting their confidence, they might open up and mention poverty and corruption as well.

Ask a Filipino what he knows about Korea and one of the most definite answers would be *Hallyu*—the K-dramas, Korean actors and K-Pop. If one probes deeper they might share their impression of how serious Koreans are; how sombre they are and are so driven by work and the economy. They are very different from us, Filipinos, who are said to be one of the happiest people on earth.

It is our job as people in the academe, non-government organizations and government agencies to be steadfast in educating our people—the South Koreans and the Filipinos--- to better understand each other and step free from stereotypes that twist our realities. The conference today tries to address the challenges of providing some depth to Philippine and Korean bilateral ties in this new millennium.

Before we end today's conference, let me share with you three observations I was able to cull from the discussions today. First, from the issues tackled in Panel 1 *Multiculturalism in Contemporary Korean Society*, it was argued that the primary obstacle for a true harmonious

relationship between the two countries are issues about race. Korea, is still a conservative society overall. However, its being a major stakeholder in global society, is creating such big pressure on it that change in its people's attitude is the only option for Korea to emerge as a global leader not only in the economic aspect but in the social one as well. Quoting from Prof. de Dios' talk earlier on what South Korea's multicultural policies need to embrace to be truly effective, she said that these:

need to veer away from purely assimilationist bias to a more inclusive policy of allowing diverse migrant communities in interaction with citizens to develop and build multicultural communities that embrace human rights , cultural diversity and gender equality as values that are necessary in building humane and multicultural societies.

Perhaps as an instance of better policies, the representation of Kopinos into both mainstream Korean community, through its mass media may help move toward this change. The Philippine government from its side should also protect these bi-racial children through more effective policies. As. Ms. Son Said:

The issue of Kopinos will remain and leave a legacy in the Korean-Philippine space despite the changing circumstances. To understand and transform this space, it is necessary that

intolerance, prejudice, and stereotyping be replaced with critical thinking, empathy, and discussions on policy changes.

My second observation is culled from panel 2 on *Labor and Migration* is that indeed there is no abating the interdependence of South Korea and the Philippines' labor markets, however legislation needs to catch up on addressing the problems or gaps in our late capitalist reality . As Ms. Seachon argued, the problem of undocumented Filipino workers in South Korea should continue to be resolved to make employment situations better for our *kababayans* (countrymen) in Korea. The Philippine government should step in to be dedicated partners to the Republic of Korea for this cause in carrying out the EPS policy.

Ms. Kim Dohye, on the other hand, gave data on a pressing reality for Koreans living in the Philippines. Her study on Korean retirees in the Philippines is fertile for analysis. What can the South Korean retirees provide its new environment? And how can the Philippines better take care of our guest-retirees? We need to further investigate this.

For my final observation, the third panel presents the positive outlook for both the South Korean and Philippine economies. However, there are still a lot of aspects which the Philippines can learn from Korea, especially in its technological sector. Dr. Song Kyoo Amang Kim's discussion about Korean start-up companies provide a glimpse on how such a fresh market approach may bolster better trade between the two countries and provide positive economic dividends for both.

As today's conference comes to a close we can ponder more on the reality that indeed there is a very strong necessity for Filipinos to rediscover South Korea and vice versa. Some sixty years after South Korea and the Philippines worked together during the Cold War to help preserve democracy in Korea and peace in the Asian region in general, a new enemy must be conquered by our peoples: the prevailing stereotypes that misrepresent our societies and cultures with each other. I end by posing once again this challenge to us: all of us should rethink South Korean-Philippine Relations, not for us in our mid-careers in the academe, NGOs or the government, but for our youth, the so-called Millennials. We need to create new models that will re-introduce our countries to those next in line for they will continue to forge ties with each other in the years ahead.