

KEYNOTE PRESENTATION

Bridging the Transnational Divide: Enhancing the Philippine-Korean Engagement

by **Hon. Luis T. Cruz**

Faculty members, conference organizers, students, friends, ladies and gentlemen, a pleasant morning.

It is my honor to be chosen as your keynote speaker in this year's conference of the Ateneo Initiative for Korean Studies (AIKS), which builds on the theme, "*Investigating Transnational Spaces in Philippine-Korean Relations.*"

The intention of this conference draws us to the interconnectedness of two countries whose mutual collaboration poses a very promising potential towards sustaining inclusive growth, as well as fostering more practical and substantive Philippines-Korea relations.

In major ways, this also makes me ponder on the convergence and commonality of values between Filipinos and Koreans, rather than their divergence and difference. Hopefully, this talk may be able to provide you a realistic glimpse of what has come to pass in terms of Philippine engagement with the Republic of Korea, and how we wish to see the picture ahead.

As the former Philippine ambassador to Korea for six years, I had the opportunity to witness firsthand wide array of expertise and know-how in which the Philippines can learn

from Korea, and vice-versa. I share your desire in understanding Korea, its culture and its people. In the same vein, as a diplomat and as a Filipino, I belong to the ambit of inquisitive minds held together by the existence of what we call today as transnational spaces.

Transnational spaces

In time, the fast pace of exchange enabled transnational spaces to inevitably interact with one another. They open doors for researchers, members of the academe, and the likes working on “migration and diaspora, geopolitics, borders and citizenship, as well as the social, cultural, political and material dimensions of transnational lives and spaces.”¹

In the wake of globalization, these transnational spaces have been enhanced by many different factors, including by the proliferation of mass media and modern communication technologies, by the rapid expansion in the travel sector, as well as by international migration movements.

Such “broader processes facilitate the cross-border movement and exchange of goods and information, as well as the mobility of people. In the entirety, this creates a new interconnectedness beyond nation-state borders.”²

¹*Transnational spaces*. University College London, Department of Geography. Accessed on 1 September 2015 via <http://www.geog.ucl.ac.uk/research/transnational-spaces>

²*Transnationalization and Development*. University of Vienna, Department of Development Studies. Accessed on 1 September 2015 via <http://ie.univie.ac.at/en/research/research-areas/transnational-space/>

As technology enables people to maintain multi-stranded connections with their countries of origin and settlement, “they engage with the world with transnational identities that negotiate a complex network of values, ideologies, and cultures.” In the process, the structures of migrant socializations change along with the patterns of migrant movement and employment.”³

PH-Korea transnational experience

The PH-Korean experience offers a compelling model. Aside from having shared historical and political narratives, PH and Korea pursue an impressive sense of transnationalism—exemplifying the kind of dynamism that goes beyond the conceptual and spatial borders.

As migrant individuals from both sides cross borders through varying immigration motivations—as investors/businessmen, as professionals/workers, as students, as tourists—the course of their assimilation varies.

“Strong people-to-people exchanges have become one of the most meaningful and moving anchors of PH-Korea relations. By fostering greater understanding and interaction among their peoples, Philippine and Korean societies and cultures become further enhanced and interconnected.”⁴

³ *Transnational Identity and Migrant Language Learners: The Promise of Digital Storytelling*. Darvin, R. University of British Columbia, Department of Language and Literacy Education.

⁴ Inputs from the Philippine Embassy in Seoul. Fax dated 6 August 2015. ZSK-850-2015. Department of Foreign Affairs, The Philippines.

Following are some practical realities on PH-ROK bond, as emphasized by our Philippine Embassy in Seoul:⁵

- Interaction between Filipinos and Koreans has long been on an upward trajectory. More and more Filipinos go to Korea for work, while Koreans continue to travel, study and start businesses in the Philippines. There are around 100,000 Korean permanent residents in the Philippines, by far the largest ethnicity of immigrants to the country, and about 52,000 Filipinos working and residing in Korea.
- Korea plays host to a growing number of Filipino workers. The signing of an agreement on the Employment Permit System (EPS) in 2004 had advanced labor cooperation between the two countries. Through this system, Korea recruits thousands of Filipinos annually. Currently, 45 percent of all Filipino residents in Korea are under the EPS. The rest are professionals, students, entertainers, household service workers and religious workers.
- In addition to Filipino workers, Korea is also home to more than 10,000 Filipino marriage immigrants—Filipinos married to Korean nationals. Another 16,000 Filipino women have become naturalized Koreans who contribute to the future diversification, steady advancement

⁵ Ibid.

and consequently greater competitiveness of Korean society in a heterogeneous global community in the 21st century. An outstanding and dramatic milestone in this phenomenon is the election of Philippine-born Jasmin Lee as member of the National Assembly in April 2012, thus becoming the first naturalized Korean to become legislator in Korea.

- The potential for more active and dynamic people-to-people exchanges in the future is almost guaranteed given the two countries' deep historical and cultural affinity with each other. With more and more Koreans coming to visit or study in the Philippines, and with Korean music (popularly refers to as K-pop) and Korean dramas getting more air time on radio and TV, ordinary Filipinos have become more familiar with Koreans and Korea on a daily basis.
- As Hallyu (Korean wave) reaches a high watermark in popularity in the country, the Philippines is also expected to strengthen its cultural promotion in Korea. The rising tide of Korean culture should prompt Filipino authorities and content creators to also ride the current of cultural exchange in the other direction for a more meaningful and mutually beneficial interaction.
- Aside from quenching a yearning for home among nostalgic Filipinos living in Korea, the Philippines should also establish a beachhead for

its traditional and contemporary arts among Koreans who are developing a thirst for more cosmopolitan offerings from overseas.

- In terms of tourism, the Philippines regards Korea as an enduring market of high value for inbound tourism. In 2015, 1,175,472 Koreans visited the Philippines, accounting for more than 20 percent of the country's total tourist arrivals. This has made Korea the top source of foreign tourists to the Philippines since 2006. Airline linkages have also been on an upswing with over 150 flights between the Philippines and Korea on a weekly basis, or more than 20 flights every day.

The distinct yet proximate geographic locations prove to be the Philippines' biggest advantage—it is far enough to experience differences in climate yet near enough to be within convenient and affordable flying distance from each other. Being great lovers of nature, Koreans are easily drawn to the Philippines' natural attractions, ranging from the rich biodiversity, flora and fauna, white sand beaches, mountains, rainforests, diverse marine life and dive sites. But probably the most important factor that guarantees every Korean's repeat visit is the warm and friendly welcome Filipinos effortlessly extend to every Korean visitor.

These positive developments are expected to further inspire the Philippines to intensify its tourism marketing strategies and its cooperation with Korea. Banking on its "More Fun in the Philippines" campaign, the Philippines is employing effective promotional tactics in Korea to lure more Korean tourists. The Philippine government and the local tour

associations' strong linkages with Korean tour operators are expected to be instrumental in the promotion of the sun-drenched, sea-splashed archipelago as a top tourist destination for the Korean market.

On the strength of the diverse destinations and different cultures, the Philippines' product portfolio offers a wired breadth of different travel options for the Korean tourists that will cater even to the most eclectic interest. Besides language education and beach tourism, which Koreans pursue on their own, the Philippines is geared towards aggressively promoting health and wellness tourism, education tourism, as well as shopping and entertainment tourism.

Understanding Korea, its culture and its people

With such vibrancy that PH-ROK relations exudes, existing transnational divide between the two countries may be narrowed through: (1) *communication*, including conscious learning of the Korean language; (2) *immersion or integration*, including taking advantage of Korean scholarship opportunities that aim at deepening awareness on the political, historical, economic and cultural aspects of Korea; and (3) *further engagement* in business, the academe, and other potential avenues of cooperation.

The ongoing flow of Koreans to the Philippines presents a new opportunity for the continuous maturing of PH-Korea relations, from formal diplomatic and state-to-state ties and economic cooperation activities, to the level of more interpersonal relationships between Koreans and Filipinos.

Such may lead to a deeper kind of intercultural knowledge and appreciation between the two sides.⁶

However, fulfilling this task is rather difficult without the cooperation of various sectors including the sector of specialization like the Academe. At this point, I wish to emphasize that the role of the Academe is to bridge the gap between the motivations and the ways of understanding Korea, and that is through the continuous development of Korean Studies in the country.

To ensure the sustainability of Korean studies, maintaining a “viable intellectual system”⁷ is imperative. And, this is where the role of AIKS and similar organizations comes in the big picture. I hope that the AIKS will remain true to its two-pronged mission of “stimulating interest in Korea and its culture among the members of its community, and to contribute as well to the strengthening of Philippines-Korea partnership.”⁸

For the students, while you should be thankful for scholarship opportunities being granted to you, this should not limit you from advancing Philippine interests in various fields of endeavors. I would like to remind you that such scholarships shall be considered a chance to see how you can help the Philippines by learning from experiences and specializations of other countries.

⁶ *Understanding the Korean Diaspora in the Philippines*. Miralao, V. Exploring Transnational Communities in the Philippines. 2007.

⁷ *Exploring the Future of Korean Studies Worldwide*. Huh Jin-suk. The Dong-a Ilbo
http://www.koreana.or.kr/months/news_view.asp?b_idx=1575&lang=en&page_type=list

⁸ <http://www.ateneo.edu/aiks>. Accessed 2 September 2015.

For an instance, you may engage Korea, world leader in science and technology, by maximizing scholarship offerings in the field of its expertise, instead of focusing on liberal arts, which may already be adequately provided by our country.

In light of the increasing “value placed on pluralism and multiculturalism in today’s globalizing societies,” Koreans and Filipinos are presented with an opportunity to “appreciate their differences and co-exist”⁹ within and beyond respective transnational spaces.

The AIKS can serve as ready partner of the government in realizing this vision.

Thank you and congratulations on your second conference.

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Mr. Luis T. Cruz reassumed the position of Assistant Secretary for ASEAN Affairs at the Department of Foreign Affairs on 01 March 2014 after a six-year posting as Philippine Ambassador to Seoul, Korea. He graduated from San Carlos Seminary with a bachelor’s degree in philosophy.

Having joined the Philippine Foreign Service in 1983, Mr. Cruz has served in Asian countries such as the People’s Republic of China (Beijing and Guangzhou), Malaysia and the Republic of Korea.

⁹ *Understanding the Korean Diaspora in the Philippines*. Miralao, V. Exploring Transnational Communities in the Philippines. 2007.

During his posting in Korea, Mr. Cruz led the Embassy in promoting bilateral relations, which covered such areas as political, security, economic, tourism, investments and cultural promotion. He was also active in promoting the integration of the Filipino community into Korean society.

In August 2007, Assistant Secretary Cruz received the Lakandula Achievement Award from the Office of the President and the Gawad Mabini Leadership Award from the Department of Foreign Affairs for his outstanding work during the one-year Philippine chairmanship of ASEAN. In October 2013, Assistant Secretary Cruz received the Gawad San Lorenzo Ruiz from the Hyewadong Filipino Community for embodying the spirit of Christian leadership in the Filipino diaspora in Korea.