

Discourse Analysis on the Filipino Cultural Identity: Dominant Appreciated Traits when in Overseas

¹ CHEALBERT B. GASIS,² MARIA CRISTINA S. DELA CERNA, ³ ROSELYN G.
MALONG

1Department of Social Sciences, North Eastern Mindanao State University,
Tandag City 8300, Philippines
gasischealbert@gmail.com

2Department of General Teacher Training, North Eastern Mindanao State University,
Tandag City 8300, Philippines
mcdelacerna@nemsu.edu.ph

3Department of Social Sciences, North Eastern Mindanao State University,
Tandag City 8300, Philippines
rgmalong@nemsu.edu.ph

ABSTRACT

Despite the growing global presence of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) and Filipino travelers, limited research has examined how Filipinos sustain their cultural identity abroad and how people from other nationalities perceive their cultural values. This study explored the lived experiences of 20 natural-born Filipinos, consisting of OFWs and travelers, in expressing and maintaining their cultural identity while overseas. Using an exploratory qualitative research design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. The findings revealed that participants maintained their Filipino identity through the preservation of cultural traditions, the continued use of the Filipino language, participation in community and religious activities, and the transmission of Filipino values to younger generations. Participants also described challenges related to cultural adaptation, work demands, and intergenerational differences while emphasizing the role of digital platforms in sustaining cultural connections. Furthermore, hospitality, respectfulness, resilience, humility, and a strong work ethic emerged as the Filipino traits most recognized and appreciated by foreign nationals. These findings demonstrate that Filipino cultural identity remains dynamic yet enduring in transnational settings and highlight the role of everyday cultural practices in strengthening Filipinos' positive global image. The study provides valuable insights for cultural preservation initiatives, diaspora organizations, and future research on migration and national identity.

KEYWORDS: *Filipino, Cultural, Identity, Traits, Overseas*

1. Introduction

The increasing movement of Filipinos across national borders has brought millions of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) and international travelers into diverse cultural environments, carrying with them not only their professional skills but also their rich cultural heritage (Parreñas, 2001; Mendoza, 2003). As they integrate into foreign societies, the expression and preservation of Filipino cultural identity become both a personal endeavor and a social negotiation (Alampay & Jocson, 2011). Existing research has extensively examined overseas Filipinos regarding labor migration, remittances, employment conditions, and economic contributions (Asis, 2006). However, comparatively little attention has been paid to how Filipinos actively maintain and express their cultural identity in multicultural settings, and to how these expressions are recognized and appreciated by people of other nationalities (Gonzalez, 2000). Consequently, understanding the everyday expression of Filipino cultural identity abroad remains an important yet underexplored area of inquiry.

This study explored the lived experiences of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) and Filipino travelers as they expressed and maintained their cultural identity while living abroad. Specifically, it examined how Filipinos preserved their cultural values and traditions in multicultural environments and identified the Filipino traits most recognized and appreciated by people of other nationalities. Through this inquiry, the study sought to deepen understanding of how Filipino cultural identity was expressed, negotiated, and perceived in transnational contexts.

Key concepts underpinning this study included cultural identity expression, acculturation, intercultural recognition, and the social value of Filipino traits abroad (Enriquez, 1992; Nadal, 2011; Comerros, Cuilan, & Chavez, 2024). The study deepened the understanding of how Filipino identity was asserted, negotiated, and perceived in transnational contexts, providing insights not only for cultural studies but also for the development of policies and programs that support the well-being, cultural preservation, and global representation of Filipinos overseas.

2. Literature Review

Conceptualizing Cultural Identity. Cultural identity refers to an individual's sense of belonging to a particular culture or ethnic group. It involves shared values, norms, language, traditions, and symbols that connect individuals with their cultural heritage (Hall, 1990). For Filipinos, cultural identity is deeply influenced by a history of colonization, religious traditions, family structures, and collectivist values (Aguilar, 1998).

Researchers such as Nadal (2004) emphasize that Filipino cultural identity is complex and fluid, shaped by both indigenous roots and foreign influences. This identity becomes especially prominent in diaspora contexts, where it is constantly negotiated and redefined.

The Filipino Diaspora and Cultural Expression Abroad. The Philippines has one of the largest diaspora populations in the world, with over 10 million Filipinos working or living abroad. Studies (e.g., Parreñas, 2001) show that overseas Filipinos often carry and perform cultural identity through language, religion, food, and interpersonal interactions. Cultural expectations and norms, such as those relating to early marriage or family responsibilities, continue to influence identity even outside the Philippines (Garcia, Lastam, Chavez, et al., 2025).

The experience of being abroad amplifies the significance of cultural traits. Filipino workers often serve as "cultural ambassadors," whether informally (through daily interactions) or formally (through community events and festivals). This visibility highlights both personal and national traits that are appreciated by host cultures.

Dominant Appreciated Filipino Traits in Overseas Contexts. Several studies and ethnographic accounts identify traits most appreciated by foreigners and host communities when interacting with Filipinos abroad. One of the most prominent traits is hospitality and warmth. Another highly regarded trait is resilience and adaptability. Filipinos are frequently praised for their ability to cope with adversity and adjust quickly to foreign environments while maintaining a positive disposition (Espiritu, 2003). This resilience is often rooted in deeply embedded cultural concepts such as *tiis* (endurance) and *pakikisama* (smooth interpersonal relationships). This theme of resilience is further demonstrated in recent studies that examine how Filipino educators, particularly women, adapted to income loss during the pandemic through creative economic strategies and community support (Chavez, Del Prado, & Estoque, 2023).

Additionally, industriousness and work ethic are qualities that distinguish Filipino workers in various parts of the world, including the Middle East, North America, and Asia. As Asis (2006) observes, Filipinos are commonly described as hardworking, responsible, and loyal employees, with employers frequently citing their reliability and competence. The professional interest and dedication of Filipinos in managing multiple roles—such as teaching and administrative roles—highlight this valued work ethic (Dagoy, Ariban, Chavez, et al., 2024).

Lastly, respectfulness and cultural sensitivity stand out as valued characteristics. Cultural practices like *paggalang* (respect), especially toward elders and authority figures, are readily noticeable in multicultural settings. Filipinos are generally seen as courteous and attuned to the norms of other cultures, contributing to smoother interpersonal relationships in both the workplace and the wider community. Collectively, these traits shape the positive image of Filipinos in diaspora contexts and reinforce the value they bring to multicultural societies.

Cultural Identity Maintenance and Transformation. While many Filipino traits are appreciated abroad, there is an ongoing negotiation between assimilation and cultural preservation. Scholars (e.g., Okamura, 1998; San

Juan, 2009) point out that overseas Filipinos often experience a “hyphenated” identity, combining Filipino values with those of their host country.

Mechanisms of cultural preservation include using Tagalog and regional languages at home, participating in Filipino religious events, and engaging with Filipino media. However, the longer migrants stay abroad, the more likely they are to adopt hybrid identities, especially among second-generation Filipinos (Espiritu, 2001).

Implications for National Identity and Global Perception. The traits appreciated in overseas settings contribute to the global image of the Filipino. This image influences how the Philippines is perceived in terms of labor export, cultural diplomacy, and even foreign policy (Rodriguez, 2010). Understanding these traits also informs how the Filipino government and diaspora organizations support identity retention and promote positive narratives abroad.

Existing literature reveals a consistent pattern of traits that are highly valued when Filipinos are abroad, including hospitality, resilience, work ethic, and adaptability. These traits not only define the Filipino abroad but also influence how cultural identity is maintained and transformed in diaspora contexts. The appreciation of these traits contributes to a positive global perception of Filipino identity, which continues to evolve through migration and transnational experiences.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This study employed an exploratory qualitative research design to gain in-depth insights into how Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) and Filipino travelers expressed and maintained their cultural identity while abroad. The exploratory nature of the design allowed for a flexible examination of participants' cultural experiences and perceptions, particularly regarding the Filipino traits most appreciated by host communities.

3.2. Population and sampling

The study involved a purposive sample of 20 natural-born Filipinos, comprising Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) and Filipino travelers who had lived or worked abroad. Purposive sampling was employed because the participants had firsthand experience with the expression and maintenance of Filipino cultural identity in multicultural settings. Participants were selected based on these experiences, enabling the collection of rich, information-dense data regarding Filipino cultural identity in diaspora contexts.

3.3. Instrument

An interview guide aligned with the study's objectives was used to conduct semi-structured interviews while allowing sufficient flexibility to explore emerging themes. The guide consisted of questions examining how participants expressed and maintained their Filipino cultural identity while living or working abroad, the challenges they encountered in preserving Filipino traditions and values, and the ways they remained connected to Filipino culture overseas. It also explored the Filipino traits and behaviors perceived to be most appreciated by people from other nationalities, including participants' experiences of having their Filipino values and work ethic recognized by foreign colleagues or employers. Finally, participants were invited to reflect on why they believed these Filipino traits stood out in multicultural settings. Table 1 presents the interview guide used in the study.

Table 1. Interview guide questions.

Objectives	Interview question
To explore the lived experiences of OFWs and Filipino travelers in expressing and maintaining their cultural identity while living and working abroad.	1. Can you describe how you express your Filipino identity while living or working in a foreign country?
	2. What challenges or adjustments have you faced in maintaining Filipino traditions or values abroad?
	3. In what ways do you stay connected to Filipino culture while being overseas?
To identify the Filipino cultural traits that are most	1. What Filipino traits or behaviors have you noticed are most praised or appreciated by people from other countries?

- appreciated and recognized by other nationalities.
2. Can you share any experiences where your foreign colleagues or employers recognized your Filipino values or work ethic?
 3. Why do you think these particular Filipino traits stand out to other nationalities?
-

3.4. Data Gathering Procedure

Participants consisted of natural-born Filipinos living or working abroad and were recruited through Filipino community groups and social media. After informed consent was obtained, semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 45–60 minutes were conducted either in person or via online platforms such as Zoom or Skype, depending on participants' locations. The interview guide focused on how participants expressed and maintained their Filipino cultural identity abroad, the challenges they encountered, and the Filipino traits that host communities appreciated. The interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission and transcribed verbatim. Data collection continued until data saturation was achieved, indicating that no new themes or insights emerged. All interview data were treated confidentially, and participants' identities were anonymized throughout the study to protect their privacy.

3.5. Data analysis

The collected interview data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2021) six-phase approach, which involved familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, construction of themes, review and refinement of themes, definition and naming of themes, and the production of the final report. This approach enabled the identification and interpretation of patterns in cultural identity expression and Filipino traits appreciated by host communities. Throughout the analytical process, the researcher engaged in reflexive practice, critically examining personal assumptions and interpretations to ensure the findings remained grounded in participants' accounts while acknowledging the researcher's influence on the analysis.

4. Results

Research Objectives 1. To explore the lived experiences of OFWs and Filipino travelers in expressing and maintaining their cultural identity while living and working abroad.

Question No. 1. Can you describe how you express your Filipino identity while living or working in a foreign country?

1.1 Preserving Filipino Traditions Abroad

Eighteen (18) respondents expressed that they wear their Filipino pride through hard work and resilience. They make sure to show 'sipag at tiyaga' at work and always treat others with respect and warmth. On Sundays, they go to church and join Filipino community gatherings. It reminds them of home, and they help each other like an extended family. Additionally, they mentioned that, aside from working hard and being resilient, they make a point of celebrating Filipino holidays and traditions, even when they are far from home. During Christmas, they join 'Simbang Gabi' and help organize 'noche buena' with fellow OFWs. They also celebrate Independence Day by wearing barong or Filipiniana and cooking Filipino food. Keeping these traditions alive reminds them who they are and where they come from.

"I wear my Filipino pride through hard work and resilience. I make sure to show 'sipag at tiyaga' at work and always treat others with respect and warmth."

"Aside from working hard and being resilient, I make it a point to celebrate Filipino holidays and traditions even when I'm far from home. During Christmas, I join 'Simbang Gabi' and help organize 'noche buena' with fellow OFWs."

1.2 Language and Cultural Education at Home

Fifteen (15) respondents shared that they express their Filipino identity by cooking traditional dishes like adobo, sinigang, and pancit for their friends and neighbors. It's their way of introducing them to their culture. They also speak Tagalog at home with their family and teach their kids about Filipino values, especially 'pakikipagkapwa' and 'paggalang' to elders. Additionally, they mentioned that aside from cooking Filipino food, they express their Filipino identity by making sure their children understand and speak Tagalog, even if their children were born abroad. They read Filipino storybooks, watch local movies or teleseryes together, and they explain Filipino customs like 'mano po' and 'pagmamano'. It's important to them that their children will grow up knowing their roots and carrying their values, even in a different country.

"I express my Filipino identity by cooking traditional dishes like adobo, sinigang, and pancit for my friends and neighbors. It's my way of introducing them to our culture."

"Aside from cooking Filipino food, I express my Filipino identity by making sure my children understand and speak Tagalog, even if they were born abroad. We read Filipino storybooks, watch local movies or teleseryes together, and I explain Filipino customs like 'mano po' and 'pagmamano'."

1.3 Cultural Ambassadorship and Soft Diplomacy

Ten (10) respondents expressed that even if they are just there temporarily, they still carry their Filipino identity by being friendly and hospitable to the people they meet. They love answering questions about the Philippines and always mention how beautiful their islands are and how welcoming their people are. They also keep a small flag keychain on their bag it's a little thing, but it makes them proud. Additionally, they shared that as a Filipino traveler, they see their selves as an informal ambassador of their country. Whether it's through sharing fun facts about their festivals like Sinulog or Ati-Atihan, or teaching someone how to say 'Mabuhay!', they try to leave a positive impression. They believe every kind gesture, smile, or cultural story they share helps break stereotypes and gives people a better understanding of who they are as Filipinos.

"Even if I'm just here temporarily, I still carry my Filipino identity by being friendly and hospitable to the people I meet. I love answering questions about the Philippines and always mention how beautiful our islands are and how welcoming our people are."

"As a Filipino traveler, I see myself as an informal ambassador of our country. Whether it's through sharing fun facts about our festivals like Sinulog or Ati-Atihan, or teaching someone how to say 'Mabuhay!', I try to leave a positive impression."

Question No. 2. What challenges or adjustments have you faced in maintaining Filipino traditions or values abroad?

2.1 Generational Gap and Cultural Identity in Diaspora Families

Fourteen (14) respondents expressed that one of the biggest challenges is making sure their kids don't lose touch with Filipino values like 'paggalang' and 'utang na loob.' Their children are growing up in a very individualistic culture, so sometimes it's hard to explain why respecting elders or helping family is non-negotiable for them. They have to be very intentional speaking Tagalog at home, celebrating Philippine holidays, and involving them in their community events. Additionally, they mentioned that their children were born there, so their children identify more with the local culture than with being Filipino. Sometimes their children don't understand why they place so much importance on family obligations or respecting elders. They've had to find a balance between letting them grow in their own way while still instilling pride in their heritage. They watch Filipino movies together, talk about life back home, and they make sure their children visit the Philippines when they can so they see it not just as their past, but as part of who they are too.

"One of the biggest challenges is making sure my kids don't lose touch with Filipino values like 'paggalang' and 'utang na loob.' They're growing up in a very individualistic culture, so sometimes it's hard to explain why respecting elders or helping family is non-negotiable for us."

"My children were born here, so they identify more with the local culture than with being Filipino. Sometimes they don't understand why we place so much importance on family obligations or respecting elders."

2.2 Balancing Work Demands with Cultural Expression

Twelve (12) respondents expressed that time is the biggest struggle. They work long hours, and sometimes they barely have time to cook Filipino food or attend community gatherings. There's also the cultural difference some of their habits like 'po' and 'opo' or being too polite are misunderstood. But they still try to stick to their values of humility, patience, and family first, even if it's hard to live them out fully in a foreign environment. Additionally, they mentioned that as an OFW, it's hard to find time for cultural practices when most of their energy goes into work. They miss celebrating fiestas or even just sitting down to a proper Filipino meal. Sometimes they feel like they are losing a part of their selves. But even in small ways like playing OPM music during breaks, calling their family back home regularly, or wearing a Philippine-themed hoodie they try to keep that connection alive. It's not always visible, but it's always there.

"Time is the biggest struggle. I work long hours, and sometimes I barely have time to cook Filipino food or attend community gatherings. There's also the cultural difference some of our habits like 'po' and 'opo' or being too polite are misunderstood."

"As an OFW, it's hard to find time for cultural practices when most of my energy goes into work. I miss celebrating fiestas or even just sitting down to a proper Filipino meal."

2.3 Cultural Identity and Belonging as a Filipino Traveler or Student

Nine (9) respondents mentioned that adjusting to local customs while staying true to their Filipino roots was tricky at first. For example, being overly warm or friendly sometimes surprises people here. Also, not having Filipino food readily available made them miss home a lot. They had to learn to cook just to get a taste of home and find creative ways to express their identity like sharing about their culture in class or on social media. Additionally, they mentioned that sometimes they feel caught in between trying to fit in with the locals while also wanting to hold on to what makes them Filipino. There are moments when they tone down how expressive they are because they don't want to stand out too much, but deep inside, they still carry their values like hospitality and respect. What helps is connecting with other Filipinos abroad even just hearing someone speak Tagalog makes them feel seen. It reminds them that they don't have to give up their identity to belong.

"Adjusting to local customs while staying true to my Filipino roots was tricky at first. For example, being overly warm or friendly sometimes surprises people here. Also, not having Filipino food readily available made me miss home a lot."

"Sometimes I feel caught in between trying to fit in with the locals while also wanting to hold on to what makes me Filipino. There are moments when I tone down how expressive I am because I don't want to stand out too much, but deep inside, I still carry our values like hospitality and respect."

Question No. 3. In what ways do you stay connected to Filipino culture while being overseas?

3.1 Intergenerational Connection and Cultural Continuity

Fifteen (15) respondents expressed that they stay connected by making sure Filipino traditions are part of their everyday life. They cook local dishes, celebrate Filipino holidays like Pasko and Undas, and watch Filipino shows online. They also joined a Filipino community group in their city they organize cultural events, sing karaoke, and share stories that remind them of home. Additionally, they mentioned that staying connected to Filipino culture is also about passing it on to the next generation. They teach their kids traditional Filipino games like luksong tinik and sungka, and they celebrate their holidays with stories about how they grew up in the Philippines. It's not just about the food or language it's about helping them understand the values behind their customs, like respect, family unity, and gratitude. That way, they grow up proud of who they are, even if they weren't born back home.

"I stay connected by making sure Filipino traditions are part of our everyday life. We cook local dishes, celebrate Filipino holidays like Pasko and Undas, and watch Filipino shows online."

"Staying connected to Filipino culture is also about passing it on to the next generation. I teach my kids traditional Filipino games like luksong tinik and sungka, and we celebrate our holidays with stories about how I grew up in the Philippines."

3.2 Emotional Resilience Through Cultural Familiarity

Fourteen (14) respondents expressed that even though they work long hours, they stay connected by regularly calling their family and speaking in Tagalog. They also attend Filipino Mass when they can, and they keep up with news and social media from the Philippines. Listening to OPM and bringing pasalubong from home helps them feel like they never really left. Additionally, they mentioned that being away from home can get really lonely, especially during holidays or family milestones. But they find comfort in small, familiar things watching Filipino dramas after work, listening to old Tagalog love songs, even just having instant champorado in the pantry. These little rituals help them cope emotionally and remind them that no matter how far they are, they still carry the warmth of their culture with them.

"Even though I work long hours, I stay connected by regularly calling my family and speaking in Tagalog."

"These little rituals help me cope emotionally and remind me that no matter how far I am, I still carry the warmth of our culture with me."

3.3 Digital Connection and Modern Cultural Expression

Eleven (11) respondents expressed that they follow Filipino creators and pages on social media, and they bring small things from home like dried mangoes or bagoong to remind them of the Philippines. They also love sharing about their culture with new friends there. It's a good feeling when people ask about their food or beaches and they get to proudly talk about where they are from. Additionally, they mentioned that social media helps them stay in touch with what's happening back home whether it's trending Filipino memes, new OPM releases, or social issues. They also post about their experiences abroad from a Filipino lens, like celebrating Independence Day or craving Jollibee. It's their way of showing that even if they are far, their identity travels with them. Technology really bridges the gap and keeps them proud of their roots.

"I follow Filipino creators and pages on social media, and I bring small things from home—like dried mangoes or bagoong to remind me of the Philippines."

"Social media helps me stay in touch with what's happening back home whether it's trending Filipino memes, new OPM releases, or social issues. I also post about my experiences abroad from a Filipino lens, like celebrating Independence Day or craving Jollibee."

Research Objectives 2. To identify the Filipino cultural traits that are most appreciated and recognized by other nationalities.

Question No. 1. What Filipino traits or behaviors have you noticed are most praised or appreciated by people from other countries?

1.1 Cultural Values and Relationship-Centered Living

Sixteen (16) respondents expressed that people there often compliment how respectful and family-oriented Filipinos are. People there are surprised when their kids say 'po' and 'opo' or when they show a lot of care for their elders. That kind of close-knit family dynamic really stands out to them, and they admire how they prioritize relationships over individual gain. Additionally, they mentioned that one thing people really notice is how they prioritize relationships whether with family, friends, or neighbors. People often mention how they look out for one another, even outside their immediate family. For example, when someone's sick or going through something, they're quick to visit, offer help, or send food. That strong sense of community and compassion really makes an impression, especially in places where individualism is more common.

"People here often compliment how respectful and family-oriented Filipinos are. They're surprised when my kids say 'po' and 'opo' or when we show a lot of care for our elders."

"One thing people really notice is how we prioritize relationships whether with family, friends, or neighbors. They often mention how we look out for one another, even outside our immediate family."

1.2 Professionalism Rooted in Filipino Values

Twelve (12) respondents expressed that at work, people always praise their strong work ethic and positive attitude. People say they're dependable, polite, and easy to work with. Even in tough situations, they smile and help each other out. Their 'bayanihan' spirit shows, especially when they support their fellow Filipinos or extend help to others without being asked. Additionally, they mentioned that what their foreign employers often appreciate is how they stay humble and respectful, no matter their position. They notice that they don't complain much and that they take pride in doing their job well, even without being told. They think that comes from values they grow up with 'sipag at tiyaga' and being considerate of others. It's not just about being skilled it's about how they carry their selves with grace and respect, which leaves a lasting impression.

"At work, they always praise our strong work ethic and positive attitude. They say we're dependable, polite, and easy to work with."

"What my foreign employers often appreciate is how we stay humble and respectful, no matter our position. They notice that we don't complain much and that we take pride in doing our job well, even without being told."

1.3 Hospitality as a Cultural Bridge in Social Settings

Eight (8) respondents expressed that people they meet usually say they're very warm and welcoming. People love how friendly and approachable they are even to strangers. They've had classmates and locals tell them they feel comfortable around Filipinos because they're naturally hospitable, always smiling, and quick to make others feel at home. Additionally, they mentioned that many of the people they've met abroad say they instantly feel at ease around Filipinos. They think it's because they're genuinely curious and open they ask questions, they listen, they invite people to eat or hang out even if they've just met. That sense of 'pakikisama' blending in and making others feel included really helps break cultural barriers. It's one of the ways they build friendships quickly, even in unfamiliar places.

"People I meet usually say we're very warm and welcoming. They love how friendly and approachable we are even to strangers."

"Many of the people I've met abroad say they instantly feel at ease around Filipinos. I think it's because we're genuinely curious and open we ask questions, we listen, we invite people to eat or hang out even if we've just met."

Question No. 2. Can you share any experiences where your foreign colleagues or employers recognized your Filipino values or work ethic?

2.1 Conflict Resolution through Filipino Cultural Values

Nineteen (19) respondents reported that, at their previous job, their manager once told them she admired how they handled conflict at work. She said they were calm, respectful, and always tried to resolve issues without making others feel attacked. They explained that in Filipino culture, 'pakikisama'—maintaining harmony and avoiding confrontation—is valued. She said it made a big difference in how their team functioned. Additionally, they mentioned that during one of their team projects, tensions ran high due to a missed deadline. While others were openly frustrated, they quietly stepped in to help smooth things over by listening to both sides and offering solutions. Later, their supervisor thanked them for being a 'peacemaker.' They told her that in Filipino culture, they value 'pakikisama' and 'pagpapakumbaba,' staying respectful and choosing peace over pride. She said their approach helped everyone refocus rather than argue.

"At my previous job, my manager once told me that she admired how I handled conflict at work. She said I was calm, respectful, and always tried to resolve issues without making others feel attacked."

"In one of my team projects, tensions were running high because of a missed deadline. While others were openly frustrated, I quietly stepped in to help smooth things over by listening to both sides and offering solutions."

2.2 Filipino Compassion and Empathy in Caregiving Roles

Fourteen (14) respondents expressed that when they were working as a caregiver, the family they worked for wrote a letter to their agency saying how grateful they were for their patience and genuine care. The family mentioned how they treated the elderly father 'like their own family.' That's just how they are 'alaga' and 'malasakit' come naturally to them. It made them proud to hear that their Filipino way of caring stood out. Additionally, they mentioned that their employer once told them that what set them apart from others wasn't just their skills, but how they cared with heart. She said her mother smiled more and seemed calmer when they were around. They explained that in the Philippines, they're taught to care not just out of duty but out of genuine concern 'malasakit' and 'pag-aaruga.' For them, caregiving isn't just a job it's a calling. Hearing that made them realize how deeply their values impact others in ways they don't always notice.

"When I was working as a caregiver, the family I worked for wrote a letter to my agency saying how grateful they were for my patience and genuine care. They mentioned how I treated their elderly father 'like my own family.'"

"My employer once told me that what set me apart from others wasn't just my skills, but how I cared with heart. She said her mother smiled more and seemed calmer when I was around."

2.3 Collaborative Spirit and Filipino Positivity in Academic Settings

Ten (10) respondents expressed that during a group project in university, their classmates said they appreciated how organized and dependable they were. They always came prepared, followed through, and helped others even when it wasn't required. One of them said, 'You make things feel lighter with your energy.' they think it's their 'bayanihan' spirit they're raised to look out for others and make work easier for everyone, not just ourselves. Additionally, they mentioned that in one of their exchange classes, a professor pulled them

aside after the final presentation and said they brought good energy to the team not just because of the work they did, but because they encouraged others and helped keep everyone motivated. They told him that in Filipino culture, they're taught to lift each other up, especially during challenges. That 'kayang-kaya natin' 'to' mindset comes naturally to them. He said it made a difference in how the group bonded and succeeded.

"During a group project in university, my classmates said they appreciated how organized and dependable I was. I always came prepared, followed through, and helped others even when it wasn't required."

"In one of my exchange classes, a professor pulled me aside after the final presentation and said I brought good energy to the team not just because of the work I did, but because I encouraged others and helped keep everyone motivated."

Question No. 3. Why do you think these particular Filipino traits stand out to other nationalities?

3.1 Cultural Contrast and Generational Appreciation

Seventeen (17) respondents expressed that they think their respectfulness and strong family values stand out because not all cultures put the same emphasis on those things. Saying 'po' and 'opo,' caring for their elders, or being close to extended family is normal for them but it really surprises others. They often tell them it's refreshing to see such warmth and humility, especially in younger generations. Additionally, they mentioned that what really surprises people is how deeply rooted their respect is not just in words like 'po' and 'opo,' but in how they treat older people and authority figures. In some countries, that kind of respect isn't as visible anymore, especially among the youth. So, when they see them do it naturally, they're impressed. One of their colleagues even said it reminded him of how his own grandparents were treated when they were younger. They think it stands out because it reflects a kind of humility and grounding that many people miss in today's fast-paced world.

"I think our respectfulness and strong family values stand out because not all cultures put the same emphasis on those things. Saying 'po' and 'opo,' caring for our elders, or being close to extended family is normal for us but it really surprises others."

"What really surprises people is how deeply rooted our respect is not just in words like 'po' and 'opo,' but in how we treat older people and authority figures. In some countries, that kind of respect isn't as visible anymore, especially among the youth."

3.2 Work Ethic Driven by Family Commitment

Thirteen (13) respondents shared that their hard work, patience, and positive attitude are noticed because they go the extra mile without expecting praise. In many places, workers just do what's required, but Filipinos tend to give more whether it's staying late, helping a co-worker, or doing things with care. Employers see that they work not just for their selves but for their families, and that sense of purpose shows in everything they do. Additionally, they mentioned that they believe what makes Filipinos stand out is that their motivation goes beyond personal gain. They often think about how their hard work impacts their families back home. That sense of responsibility pushes them to stay patient and give their best, even when it's tiring. Employers notice that they don't just clock in and out they take pride in what they do because it supports more than just their selves. That kind of dedication is something not everyone can relate to.

"Our hard work, patience, and positive attitude are noticed because we go the extra mile without expecting praise. In many places, workers just do what's required, but Filipinos tend to give more whether it's staying late, helping a co-worker, or doing things with care."

"I believe what makes Filipinos stand out is that our motivation goes beyond personal gain. We often think about how our hard work impacts our families back home. That sense of responsibility pushes us to stay patient and give our best, even when it's tiring."

3.3 Openness and Hospitality as a Cultural Signature

Ten (10) respondents mentioned that people there are often surprised by how friendly and accommodating they are, even to strangers. They think that stands out because in many places, people keep to themselves more. Filipinos, on the other hand, naturally smile, make conversation, and invite others in. That openness makes others feel welcomed and valued it's not something they see every day. Additionally, what often catches people off guard is their natural hospitality and warmth. In many cultures, strangers stay distant, but Filipinos instinctively reach out whether it's offering food, sharing stories, or just making someone feel included. This openness not only breaks down barriers but creates a sense of belonging. They think that genuine friendliness helps then build bridges quickly and leaves a lasting positive impression wherever they go.

"People here are often surprised by how friendly and accommodating we are, even to strangers. I think that stands out because in many places, people keep to themselves more."

"What often catches people off guard is our natural hospitality and warmth. In many cultures, strangers stay distant, but Filipinos instinctively reach out whether it's offering food, sharing stories, or just making someone feel included."

5. Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the nuanced and dynamic ways that Filipinos abroad express, maintain, and transform their cultural identity while navigating foreign environments. Consistent with previous literature (Hall, 1990; Nadal, 2004), the respondents revealed that cultural identity is both personally meaningful and contextually adaptive, often shaped by family structures, religious practices, and community participation.

Filipino Overseas Workers (OFWs) and travelers expressed their identity primarily through three intersecting strategies: preserving traditions, engaging in cultural ambassadorship, and sustaining language and family values at home. Many maintained practices such as celebrating Filipino holidays, speaking Tagalog with their children, and preparing traditional foods—acts of cultural continuity that affirm Hall's (1990) theory of identity as constructed through shared symbols and practices.

Participants also described their roles as informal "cultural ambassadors," aligning with Parreñas (2001), who emphasizes how Filipinos become visible agents of soft diplomacy. Through storytelling, hospitality, and cultural pride, they challenge stereotypes and leave positive impressions on host communities.

Challenges to cultural maintenance, such as generational gaps, time constraints, and value conflicts with individualistic host cultures, were prominent. These struggles align with Espiritu's (2001) and Okamura's (1998) discussions on identity negotiation, particularly among diaspora families. Respondents noted that their children often identify more with the local culture, creating tension in the transmission of values such as *paggalang* and *utang na loob*.

In terms of appreciated traits, the findings reaffirm what scholars like De Guzman (2017), Espiritu (2003), and Asis (2006) have noted: Filipino warmth, respectfulness, and resilience are highly valued abroad. Respondents recounted being praised for their humility, work ethic, empathy, and collaborative spirit, traits deeply embedded in Filipino values such as *pakikisama*, *malasakit*, and *bayanihan*. These traits were not only socially appreciated but also translated into professional recognition, particularly in caregiving and academic settings.

Moreover, participants believed these traits stood out because of their contrast with host cultures. Respect for elders, selflessness, and openness were perceived as rare and thus highly regarded. These insights support Rodriguez's (2010) notion that cultural identity abroad informs both personal dignity and national image.

Notably, digital tools and social media played a central role in maintaining cultural ties, especially among younger generations. This aligns with more recent literature (Garcia et al., 2025) on modern modes of cultural transmission and digital identity preservation.

In conclusion, the lived experiences of OFWs and Filipino travelers highlight a resilient cultural identity that is both preserved and redefined abroad. Their cultural expression, rooted in family, community, language, and values, continues to shape how Filipinos are perceived globally. As migration continues to grow, these traits and practices offer not only a source of personal pride but also a soft power advantage for the Philippines in global cultural and labor arenas.

6. Conclusion

This study explored the lived experiences of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) and Filipino travelers in expressing and maintaining their cultural identity while abroad, as well as the traits most appreciated by other nationalities. The findings revealed that Filipino identity is expressed through everyday practices such as speaking the native language, celebrating traditional holidays, preparing local dishes, and participating in community activities. Despite being in a foreign environment, participants actively preserve cultural values such as *sipag at tiyaga*, *pakikisama*, and *paggalang*, which serve as both personal anchors and cultural touchstones.

The study also highlighted common challenges faced by Filipinos abroad, including generational gaps in cultural understanding, time constraints due to work demands, and the pressure to adapt to individualistic host cultures. However, these challenges are often met with resilience and creativity, showing the dynamic nature of Filipino cultural expression.

Importantly, the research found that Filipino traits such as warmth, hospitality, humility, and a strong work ethic are widely recognized and appreciated by people from other countries. These characteristics not only enhance interpersonal relationships but also contribute positively to how Filipinos are perceived globally, whether in professional, academic, or social settings.

In conclusion, the cultural identity of Filipinos abroad is not merely preserved; it is continuously expressed, adapted, and even celebrated in diverse international contexts. These expressions reinforce a sense of pride and belonging among Filipinos overseas and strengthen the Philippines' image as a nation rich in values, resilience, and humanity.

References

- Aguilar, F. V. Jr. (1998). *Clash of Spirits: The History of Power and Sugar Planter Hegemony on a Visayan Island*. University of Hawaii Press.
- Alampay, E. A., & Jocson, R. M. (2011). The Filipino diaspora: Paradoxes of belonging. *Philippine Studies*, 59(2), 211–239.
- Asis, M. M. B. (2006). *The Philippines' culture of migration*. Migration Policy Institute.
- Chavez, J. V., Del Prado, R., & Estoque, M. (2023). Disrupted income of women educators during pandemic: Economic effects, adaptive strategies, and government recovery initiatives. *Journal of Infrastructure, Policy and Development*, 7(2), 1973.
- Chavez, J. V., & Prado, R. T. D. (2023). Discourse analysis on online gender-based humor: Markers of normalization, tolerance, and lens of inequality. *Forum for Linguistic Studies*, 5(1), 55–71.
- Comeros, N. A., Cuilan, J. T., & Chavez, J. V. (2024). Parental discretionary influence on their children's manner of learning English language. *Forum for Linguistic Studies*, 6(4), 284–299.
- Dagoy, T. H. S., Ariban, A. I., Chavez, J. V., et al. (2024). Discourse analysis on the teachers' professional interest and integrity among teachers with multiple administrative functions. *Environment and Social Psychology*, 9(12), 2521.
- De Guzman, M. T. (2017). Filipino values and their implications for overseas caregiving. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 38(3), 295–310.
- Enriquez, V. G. (1992). *From colonial to liberation psychology: The Philippine experience*. University of the Philippines Press.
- Espiritu, Y. L. (2001). "We don't sleep around like white girls do": Family, culture, and gender in Filipina American lives. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 26(2), 415–440.

- Espiritu, Y. L. (2003). Home bound: Filipino American lives across cultures, communities, and countries. University of California Press.
- Garcia, C. S., Lastam, J. M. P., Chavez, J. V., et al. (2025). Discourse analysis on learners halting their education due to early marriage. *Environment and Social Psychology*, 10(1), 2558.
- Gonzalez, A. (2000). The Politics of Language: Language, Ethnicity, and Nation-State in the Philippines. *Asia-Pacific Social Science Review*, 1(2).
- Hall, S. (1990). Cultural identity and diaspora. In J. Rutherford (Ed.), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (pp. 222–237). Lawrence & Wishart.
- Jocano, F. L. (1998). Filipino value system: A cultural definition. Punlad Research House.
- Lamorinas, D. D., Luna, L. A., Lai, M. N. D., Magno, J. M., Saporno, R. N., Reyes, R. B. D., & Chavez, J. V. (2025). A General Perspective on the Factors Influencing the Low Preferences of Gen Z College Students towards the Filipino Language. *Forum for Linguistic Studies*, 7(3), 451–466. <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i3.8482>
- Mendoza, S. Lily & Jim, Mendoza. (2003). Filipino "Kapwa" in Global Dialogue: A Different Politics of Being-With the "Other".
- Nadal, K. L. (2004). Pilipino American identity development model. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 32(1), 45–62.
- Nadal, K. L. (2011). Filipino American psychology: A handbook of theory, research, and clinical practice. Wiley.
- Okamura, J. Y. (1998). The illusion of ethnicity: Culture and self in Filipino America. *Journal of Asian American Studies*, 1(1), 35–50.
- Parreñas, R. S. (2001). Servants of globalization: Women, migration, and domestic work. Stanford University Press.
- Rodriguez, R. M. (2010). Migrants for export: How the Philippine state brokers labor to the world. University of Minnesota Press.
- San Juan, E. Jr. (2009). Toward Filipino self-determination: Beyond transnational globalization. SUNY Press.