Filipino in hostess clubs

Background of Filipina hostess bars:
The Filipina hostess bars in rural areas of Japan emerged in 1980s throughout 1990s. They emerged through the convergence of two sets of political economic history:

1. The establishment of hostess bars, and later Filipina bars, in the region.
2. The development of overseas labour immigration, and particularly Filipina migration to Japan as entertainers, as an accumulation strategy in the Philippines.

History of Filipina hostess bars in rural areas of Japan and their heavy relations with construction projects (Taking Central Kiso as an example):
Hostess bars in Central Kiso were introduced to the town in the late 1950s to provide entertainment for the construction workers who came to the area to build the Makio Dam in the nearby Mitake and Otaki villages. After the dam project was finished four years later in 1951. Construction workers left the town. However, other local residents maintained that just as many bars remained. Because of relatively better economic situation in Central Kiso, many people from other parts of Japan came to Central Kiso in search for work. These people sustained local bars.

Local hostess bars originally employed Japanese women. As Japanese women left the industry, local owners have to shift their attention to people with other nationalities. It was relatively easy for Filipina women to enter Japan under entertainer visas of cultural performers. Thus, Filipina women who come to work in clubs in Japan were usually under such visas. Because of the relatively stable supply of Filipino women in Japan, clubs owners started to hire them as hostesses.

Interaction and negotiation of Japanese masculinity and femininity:
There are interaction and negotiation of masculinity and femininity observed in these Filipina hostess bars. Male customers said Filipina hostesses were attractive to them because they “came from a poor country,” and thus was “submissive” and had “the good qualities that Japanese women have lost.” They came to these bars to look for ideal femininity and to articulate masculinity. Filipina hostess bars offered these men opportunities to articulate an elite, class-based form of Japanese masculinity. A scholar named Allison said, in hostess bars Japanese men are not paying for sex but to be made to feel like powerful and desirable men. A sense of superiority was felt by the Japanese men towards women from a non-Japan and poorer area.

Situations nowadays:
Filipina bars have boomed in 1980s throughout 1990s. However, changes in Japan’s immigration policies since 1999 have made both being in Japan without a visa and procuring entertainer visas to come to Japan considerably more difficult, and ultimately forced many bars to shut down. More than that, the economies of both Japan and the Philippines also resulted in such decline.

-Situation in Japan:
The decentralization policies initiated by the national government have increasingly strained rural regions, reducing national economic support that provided jobs and pushing rural areas to become economically self-sufficient. However, these policies have been criticized by many people as well. Koizumi cabinet said to give back regions power. Regional government will have the right to collect taxes themselves from the people and decide what they want to do with the taxes. However, the over-centralized economy throughout all these years resulted in greying population especially in rural areas. Many regions were not able to collect enough taxes for big projects since their residents became really small in number.

-Situation in the Philippines:
On the other hand, economic policies in the Philippines have continued to benefit elites and foreign corporations at the expense of workers. These policies have made people in the Philippines more desperate to find work abroad and thus more vulnerable when they are overseas.

Because of the above circumstances, migration to Japan became much more difficult. Even if Filipina women manage to get into Japan, the gloomy economic situation in rural areas did not provide them with employment opportunities.

However, on the visa issue, there are plenty of illegal ways that enable Filipina women entering Japan today. One of which is “invitational marriage”. Filipina women will “marry” some Japanese men which they do not know. After marriage, they will be able to come to Japan with a valid visa. Although these are not real marriages and they are expected to work in Filipina hostess bars in Japan.

Situation in Singapore:
According to Japanese business men working in Singapore, there are similar hostess bars catered to Japanese business men. However, the situation is very similar to Japan in 1980s and 1990s. Singaporean girls gradually leave the industry and no longer want to work in such places. Today, many migrants from the Philippines, Thailand and mainland China come to Singapore with entertainment passes (a kind of visa) to work in such hostess bars.