

*Faith in the Context of Migration: Ethnographic Features of Faith of Migrant  
Filipino Catholics in Macau, China*

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**Abstract**

Filipinos comprise some of the biggest numbers of migrants worldwide, and in Macau, they are the largest non-Chinese migrant ethnic group. Mainly Catholic, they are also known to be very religious people, and as such, for most Filipinos, faith plays a central role in the migration process. This paper is a study of how Filipinos understand what faith is. A qualitative analysis of interviews with Filipino migrants in Macau reveal some major ethnographic features of the faith of Filipino Catholics particularly construed from the use of words and concepts expressed in their own language. Some of the major themes that emerged include beliefs on the role of God's agency in their lives, variations of views towards faith based on cultural traits as embodied in the use of words from their own language, and the relation between the public practice of attending mass and the private practice of personal prayer. The study also points to the need for integrating linguistic anthropology as a useful tool in providing a more nuanced analysis of faith and religious practice among migrants.

Keywords: faith, Filipino faith, immigrant religion, religion in Macau

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## **Introduction**

The Philippines has a very big number of international migrants despite its relatively smaller population compared to huge sources of migrants such as China and India. In 2015 alone, there were over 5 million Filipino migrants, comprising the eighth largest source of international migrants in the world (UN DESA, 2016). A stock estimate of Filipinos residing overseas puts the number at over 10 million (Commission on Filipinos Overseas, 2013). All these numbers point to the significance of the migration phenomenon in the lives of the Filipino people such that it has been described as already characteristic of Filipino culture (Asis, 2006).

One of the most significant characteristics of the Filipino diaspora is that they are mostly religious. The Philippines could be considered to be essentially a religious society with almost 100 percent of the population reporting that they have a religious affiliation (NSO, 2014). Since they make up a significant portion of the world's Christians and at the same time being a top source of international migrants, Filipinos surely have the critical mass to affect significant demographic changes in relation to international migration.

Figures from the Macau government's Labour Affairs Bureau indicate that Filipinos comprise the second biggest number of non-resident workers in Macau, next only to those coming from Mainland China. As of January 2018, a total of 28,947 Filipinos were working in Macau with non-resident status (DSAL, 2017) which is almost 4 percent of Macau's entire population of 646,800 (Macao Yearbook, 2016). Filipino migrants comprise the biggest minority group in terms of ethnicity granting that Mainland Chinese working in Macau are not ethnically distinct from the locals of Macau.

A big majority of Christians in the Philippines are Roman Catholic, comprising about 80 percent of the total population of the country. Catholicism was first introduced to the Philippines by the Spanish in 1521 and with close to 500 years of history and tradition, it has become deeply embedded in Filipino culture and is one of the central features of Filipino identity. With the influx to Macau of migrants from the Philippines it is important to take into consideration that religion and the religiosity of people are areas of study that are significant and would have profound implications on the lives not only of the persons who undergo the process of migration, but also the society into which these migrants enter.

## **Methodology**

Data used in this paper came from semi-structured in-depth interviews with Filipino migrants in Macau. A total of 28 persons participated in the interviews and their ages ranged from 25 to 69 years old. Most of the interviewees were chosen randomly from Filipinos situated in public places. Interviewees should satisfy three criteria, that of being an ethnic Filipino, a Catholic, and working in Macau or at least is in Macau with the main aim of looking for work. In order to record the interviews, an iPhone was used for voice recording.

Although there was essentially a core group of questions related to the research topic being asked, the interviews were conducted in a very flexible manner so as to allow a lot of room for story-telling. Interviewees were encouraged to proceed by relating their journey of migration and to see what they found to be significant and important in that experience particularly in relation to their faith.

The length of the interviews varied with the shortest being only twelve minutes in duration while the longest was 56 minutes. All interviews were conducted using the Filipino language. It was a conscious effort on the part of the researcher to conduct interviews in the native language of the subjects so as to establish rapport and also for ease of communication. The most obvious advantage of the use of the Filipino language was that it allowed for the expression of concepts and the use of words that themselves have also become central in the analysis done in this study.

The researcher transcribed the interviews by simultaneously translating them into English. The transcriptions were analyzed and coded and the most dominant concepts related to fate that emerged were collated to form major themes. These themes were explored and analyzed by way of content analysis and a combination of both phenomenological as well as grounded theory methods. Furthermore, some ethnological method of analysis (Spradley, 1979) was employed particularly through interpretation of interviewees' narratives (McCormack, 2000; Riessman, 1993). Such analysis was employed in the translation and interpretation of the cultural meaning of significant words used by the interviewees (Bradby, 2002; Inhetveen, 2012; Sheridan & Storch, 2009; Silverman, 2001; Temple & Young, 2004).

### **Variations of Fatalism vs Self-Determination**

The views that interviewees had towards the role that God plays in their life in terms of control or intervention varied. Some interviewees believe that an individual's life is already predestined and that one's life is really not under one's control while others viewed the occurrence of life events as the result or product of the individual's decisions and choices (Pepitone & Saffiotti, 1997; Risen & Gilovich, 2008; Shaffer, 1984; Young & Morris, 2004).

Religious affiliation contribute to whether individuals tend to be more inclined towards fatalism than on self-determination (Norenzayan & Lee, 2010; Young, Morris, Burrus, Krishnan, & Regmi, 2011). There is also variation in terms of degree of fatalistic belief among believers within a particular religion such as Christianity. Emphasis on teachings about the presence of a supernatural agent is a stronger determinant of fatalistic beliefs rather than ritualistic practices (Cohen, Siegel, & Rozin, 2003).

Cultural conditioning is also an important determinant of a person's belief in fatalism (Choi, Nisbett, & Norenzayan, 1999; Morris, Nisbett, & Peng, 1995) with strongly analytic cultures being less fatalistic than cultures that are strongly holistic. Despite this, the interviews have revealed that even among people who share the same culture and the same religious belief, there is not one singly view in terms of people's attributions of important events to either fate or self-determination.

### ***Total Self-determination***

None of the interviewees had a totally self-deterministic attitude towards life. All of them conceded fate attributions to God and none of them expressed the view that life is totally within the control of the individual. This indicates that for the most part, Filipino Catholics believe that God's agency is active and determines or influences one's life direction.

### ***Total Fatalism***

Some of the interviewees had strong convictions that events that transpired in their lives were not in their control but that they occurred because it was God's will. Both fortune and misfortune are not the result of one's own decisions or actions. There is the belief that whatever happens to one's life is all attributable to the handiwork of God. These occurrences are made possible because it is God's doing and the individual is just but a passive receiver of whatever it is that God intends or has preprogrammed for that particular person.

First of all, everything is God's will. I would not have experienced any of these if they were not given by God because He's the one who knows what's going to happen. In a sense, I just follow. If something was to happen, it will happen if it was meant for it to happen to you. (Interviewee 19)

For some, such a realization comes about as a result of particularly significant experiences in life that to their minds was made possible not because of their own doing.

... my separation with my first wife, perhaps it was preprogrammed. It's like a chapter in life. I don't think it was my own doing. I didn't ask, "Lord give me this kind of wife." She just came randomly. My second wife, I didn't ask, "Give me a wife like this." She just came randomly. So I can conclude that really our life, from the time of our birth, even when we are still in the womb, there already is a program meant for each of us. (Interviewee 07)

However, this kind of belief also reflects an attitude where the person is unconsciously not taking full responsibility especially for regrettable experiences that have occurred in the past. The person believes that it is God that has the say in what happens in that person's life and that the person is helpless and has no control over such events. Most of the time this is borne out of regret for some mistake committed in the past. In order to absolve oneself of responsibility for something that happened that someone otherwise would not have wanted to, they ascribe it to fate, destiny, or God's will.

It's fate. Destiny (*tadhana*). Because I do believe in that. Because in my previous experience, I was making my own destiny. However there occurred a 'lapse' (disruption in the supposed unfolding of things – referring to having a child out of wedlock). (Interviewee 23)

Such an attitude is also seen in cases where the person surrenders to God whatever the outcome, positive or negative, of certain efforts like looking for a job.

I think that if it's really not for me, then we can't do anything about it. No matter how hard you work at getting a job, if it's not meant for you, right? If it's not your destiny then it's not. (Interviewee 16)

This view about life tries to understand the relationship between one's efforts or personal agency and that of the outcomes of such efforts (Yan & Gaier, 1994; Kray, George, Liljenquist, Galinsky, Tetlock, & Roesse, 2010). In those times when wish fulfillment for a certain individual does not work out then this is rationalized by having a belief or understanding that it was not meant to be because it was not the will of God or it was not a part of God's plan for that particular individual (Malle, 1999). This can take the form of a feeling of surrender where someone can say, "Whatever your plan is for me, just do your will" (Interviewee 27). Or it can also take the form of a request for help from God that one's own plans or aspirations will be the same plan that God would have for that person (Au, Chiu, Chaturvedi, Mallorie, Viswanathan, Zhang, & Savani, 2011).

Of course, you make your own destiny. God is there to guide you in a way that you will be able to know the path that you're supposed to take. Because you're the one who's doing it. It's like it's in God's... in a sense... For example, you want a sign... Still, you're the one who... It's like, "God please give me a sign." Right? Sometimes that's what we say. But still, it's you who's going to decide on it. You just ask for a sign from God. But in a way I'm still dependent on Him... Because when he gives you a sign... Like... "That's not right." So... you already know. You'll stop doing it because you already know that there's something better that will be given to you. Because... You know that? But it's still me who makes the decision. I don't need to blame him, "Oh this happened because..." I have nobody else to blame but myself. In a sense, it's a plus factor if some good blessing happens to you. You are thankful. God is there. It's like, whether it's bad or good, you're still thankful. Because you still learn something and no matter

what, God is still there to guide you. (Interviewee 26)

The relationship between the person's agency and God's agency progresses from initially being active (on the part of the person) and then later on being passive. At the beginning the person acts in a strongly deterministic way where it would seem that destiny is in the person's hands. As soon as that determination falters perhaps as a result of failure, then it turns into passiveness in the form of surrender to the will of God and this usually ensues after the fact that one's plans did not work out the way one wanted it to.

### ***Shared Agency***

A third variation of the relationship between fatalism and self-determination that has come up from the interviews is one where God has a plan for the direction of a person's life but at the same time the individual also has control over one's destiny (Au, 2008; Au, Chiu, Zhang, Mallorie, Chaturvedi, Viswanathan, & Savani, 2011; Young & Morris, 2004). This is perhaps the most contradictory of these variations and yet it is a belief that was gleaned from several of the interviewees. One interviewee said:

No matter how much action you take but if you don't ask God, if you don't approach God, everything you do will be useless. I was able to prove that. (Interviewee 27)

In this kind of belief there is a symbiosis between a person's own efforts at life-direction and God's plans for that person. One believes that a life program is already laid out for that person and it is that person's responsibility to either figure out God's plan and fulfill it or find a way to reconcile one's efforts with the destiny that has been set out by God for that person. This would involve personal communication with God and it may also entail supplication for God's help normally through some kind of sign or message.

For example, when you make a decision, of course you have to bring it up to God. You pray... to clear your mind. You ask for a sign. Sometimes, the sign that you ask for doesn't seem to come. But once you make a decision for yourself... sometimes... Isn't it, sometimes, after you have decided, it turns out to be okay. At other times, it's not. Perhaps that's your fate... that's what has been laid out for you. But still it depends on you... on how you work on it. Just as we say, "Mercy is of God; action is of people." (*Nasa Diyos ang awa, nasa tao ang gawa.*). (Interviewee 23)

The last sentence in the quote above (*Nasa Diyos ang awa, nasa tao ang gawa*) is a very popular proverb in the Philippines. Its English equivalent would be: Just do your best and God will do the rest. In this view, responsibility is on the shoulders of the individual whose best efforts are believed to be rewarded by God. A crucial nuance that can be noticed from this kind of belief is that it depends on the outcome of one's actions. If the wish is fulfilled then the person believes that it was made possible because of God's agency and therefore it is interpreted as God's will. However, if the expected results did not materialize despite one's best efforts, the person still interprets it as God's will but instead comes to the conclusion that God must have other plans for the person. Therefore, there is the belief that despite the person being the agent of action, one still operates within the bigger plan of God.

This shared agency between God and the individual can also take on a character wherein God's involvement is symbolic. The slight difference in nuance is that in this instance God's agency appears to be merely symbolic, as though God was just a passive observer who at the same time also serves as a guide to whom the person looks up to. The responsibility lies with the person and the person believes that destiny is in one's own hands. An example of this is a statement from one of the interviewees who said:

Of course you make your own destiny. God is there to guide you in a way that you will be able to know the path that you're supposed to take. But you're the one acting on it. (Interviewee 14)

Since the themes related to God's role in the direction and outcome of one's life consistently came up in the narratives of interviewees as they related their experience of migration, it can be said that views regarding fatalism or self-determination are important elements in the faith of Filipinos. The next section looks at the more direct narrations of interviewees regarding how they view their faith.

### **Ethnographic Features of Filipino Faith**

This section discusses the different characteristics of faith that can be interpreted from the narratives of interviewees. There seemed to be as many different characteristics or versions of faith as there were interviewees. Nevertheless, some common features emerged that could be grouped together to constitute some of the major features of faith of Filipino migrants in Macau. The discussion about faith was obtained from interviewees by asking them to ascertain God's role in their experience and in the process of their migration.

#### ***Lightness of Being***

Directly related to the emotional experience associated with faith is a very particular or concrete narration of the experience which many of the interviewees described as "lightness of being." Interviewees who made reference to such an experience had one thing in common and that is all of them used the Filipino word *gaán* which literally translates to English as "light" or "not heavy." For Filipinos, when it comes to the experience of the spiritual, there seems to be always a reference to the feeling of

“lightness” as when one interviewee said, “When I go to mass I feel energized. My body feels light” (Interviewee 6).

This is also expressed in such phrases as *napakagaan ng pakiramdam*, meaning “It’s such a feeling of lightness.”

It feels very very light (*napakagaán*). Especially when you break into tears, it feels like God is very close to you.... You feel heavy-hearted (*mabigat ang loób*) when you have not gone to church. It feels light when you go to mass. The feeling is very light (*ang gaán ng pakiramdam*). (Interviewee 20)

Even if I’m very tired, I just pray and my tiredness disappears. My feeling becomes lighter (*gumagaán ang pakiramdam ko*). Because of my faith in God, I pray, even in small matters, even when I’m tired, I just pray a little, I close my eyes, I sit down, and then a little later I already feel better no matter how tiring it is to work. That’s how important my faith is to me. (Interviewee 4)

This is the common self-report of interviewees when they describe their experience after praying or after going to mass. This experience is also often compared to the opposite feeling of “heaviness.” In the Filipino language the literal translation is *kabigátan* which comes from the word *bigát*, meaning “heavy.” Whenever heaviness is used to describe some kind of feeling, the phrase normally used is *kabigátan ng loob* or literally translated as “heaviness of one’s inner being.”

Whenever I feel down and heavy (*mabigát ang loób*), I go to church..... As long as I feel down and heavy, I would kneel down... and when I have sinned. (Interviewee 7)

The word *loób* is itself very rich in meaning. *Loób* literally means “inside.” Filipinos refer to the word and use it to describe the workings of one’s interior life. However it is also commonly used in ordinary conversations that relate to social relationships since *loób* is a concept that is central to Filipino values and culture (Alejo, 1990; de Mesa, 1986; Jocano 1997; Lacaba, 1974; Miranda, 1989).

The closest translation of *kabigátan ng loób* in English is “heaviness of heart.” From this English translation it can be understood that it refers to some kind of feeling of being emotionally or spiritually burdened. Interviewees have narrated that they feel this sort of internal heaviness whenever they are not able to attend mass. So when they claim that they experience lightness of being after going to mass or during moments of intimate prayer with God, what they seem to experience is some kind of unburdening that is made possible after communicating with a powerful other. However, when interviewees described a lightness of being, most of them did so not in reference to some problem that bothers them. Even when the person was not



burdened by some problem or difficulty the experience of lightness of being is still there. One interviewee describes it by saying:

Interviewer: How important to you is going to mass? Is it important to you? What does it bring you?

Interviewee 3: Peace of mind. After the mass I feel light. Even if it's only for an hour, it feels like you're in a quiet place. Although there are many distractions, people talking, crying children, but you only need to focus. If you need to close your eyes so that you don't get distracted, I would do that just to be able to attain what I want when I go to mass. (Interviewee 8)

### ***Faith as Fear of God***

One of the most common phrases that came up in the interviews whenever Filipinos refer to faith is *tákot sa Diyos* or literally “fear of God.” As can be clearly understood from these very words, this is an understanding of faith wherein God is viewed as an authoritarian figure who is feared. The main fear associated with this belief is the fear of punishment. This fear of punishment comes from the belief that any wrongdoing will receive a corresponding punishment from God. This kind of faith is therefore directly related to moral behavior particularly in terms of one's relationship with others.

If you have no faith, or fear of God (*tákot sa Diyos*), of course you'll end up doing wrong to others. Right? That's why you need to have faith. (Interviewee 26)

This seems to be the simplest kind of faith that has been shown by interviewees who referred to it. It could also be described as very basic or visceral. The conception and understanding is fairly straightforward since it involves an authoritarian figure (God) that watches a person's actions and that person is liable to God even though one's wrongdoings are committed against fellow humans. Similarly, having the fear of God can also be seen as a guide for proper moral behavior particularly in terms of one's relationship with others. The absence of the fear of God is likened to having no moral guide.

It's like falling into the abyss of vices. You no longer have anything to hold on to because you no longer have any fear of God (*tákot sa Diyos*). In a way, you will find yourself going back again and again to what is undesirable. Right? In a way there's nobody guiding (*gumágabay*) you anymore. (Interviewee 20)

This perspective of faith in some cases is regarded as very basic and essential that having fear of God alone is seen as sufficient and can excuse someone from observing other ritual obligations such as going to mass.

Yes I pray. In the morning I give thanks to God. At night I say, “Thank you.” I say, “Good night” (to God). But I’m more into faith. It’s like, as long as I don’t do anything wrong... You are God-fearing (*may tákot sa Diyos*) but it’s just that you don’t go to church. But it’s much more of... for me... that I’m God-fearing (*may tákot sa Diyos*), I’m helpful to my fellows (*kápwa*). (Interviewee 17)

The quote above merges together the socio-moral underpinnings of fear of God while at the same time linking it to personal prayer or spirituality such that in the opinion of the interviewee, not going to mass is made up for by having fear of God. This is also seen in this quote from another interviewee when asked how religious his family of origin was.

Interviewer: How religious is your family?  
Interviewee 14: Sometimes my father, he doesn’t go to church but he has a fear of God (*tákot sa Diyos*).

### ***Faith as Holding on to God***

A feature of Filipino faith that was prominent in the interviews is one in which God is considered to be the only lifeline of the person. When asked about what their religion or their faith meant to them especially with the thought that they were migrant workers, many interviewees expressed that faith was the only thing that they can hold on to because they have nothing else. The way by which they expressed this was through the use of words such as *kinakapítan* (something to hold on to), *kakampí* (supporter/on the same side or team), and *sandálan* (something to lean on). When asked what their faith meant to them or the importance of prayer in their life, below were some of the responses of some interviewees.

That’s your only support (*kakampí*)—prayer and God. There is no one else that you can call upon but only Him. (Interviewee 11)

I especially requested to have Sunday as my day off because that (the mass) was what I held on to (*kinapítan*) in the span of two years. It was what I held on to (*Iyon ang kinapítan ko*). (Interviewee 19)

When you have a problem especially being an OFW (overseas Filipino worker), it’s very difficult. That’s the only thing that you can lean on to (*sandálan*)—prayer. (Interviewee 20)

I did not have anything to hold on to (*kinakapítan*).  
I had no family. There was nobody I could lean on  
to (*sandálan*) except God. (Interviewee 24)

Also when asked what they think would happen to them if prayer was taken away from them completely, the common response was one of imagined despair where everything about life would seem to have lost all meaning or purpose or that life would be incomplete.

Interviewer: What if prayer was taken away from  
your life? Interviewee 20: That would be it.

Interviewee 22: That would be it. Everything would  
be gone

Interviewer: What do you mean by “that’s it”?

Interviewee 21: You wouldn’t have any value in  
this world.

Interviewee 20: You’re spent (*lustay ka na*). In a  
sense, you’re headed for something that’s not good  
because you don’t have... you have nothing to hold  
on to (*wala ka nang kinakapítan*).

Interviewer: What does being “spent” (*lustay*)  
mean?

Interviewee 20: You’re spent. You lose your  
support (*wala ka nang kakampí*) anymore.

Interviewee 21: It’s like splurging and losing  
everything.

The interviewees’ use of the word *kinakapítan* is associated with a vivid metaphor. The root word is *kápit* which means to hold on to something so as to maintain one’s balance for instance or to prevent someone from falling, drowning, or being left behind. There is even a commonly used Filipino maxim that says *kápit sa patalím* or “holding on to a blade or a sharp-edged object” (or knife). This phrase is used to describe somebody in a very desperate situation, so desperate that one would even go to the extreme of holding on to a knife if only not to fall down. The word *kápit* then has something to do with one’s hand holding on to something. Therefore, when it comes to a person’s faith, the use of the word *kápit* is directly associated with holding on to the hand of God for dear life.

### ***Faith as Source of Strength***

Similar to the view of faith as holding on to God is the understanding of faith as a source of strength. This becomes especially significant with the situation of being a migrant.

Here in Macau? It’s only God who I have... Well,  
it’s because even if your family is there for you,  
God is the only one who can give you strength

(*lakás*), like inner strength (*lakás ng loób*). Right? .... It's the strength (*lakás*). It is what gives you strength (*lakás*). (Interviewee 2)

Faith is very important. Because it gives strength (*lakás*) and in the things that we face everyday, if God is not there, if the one up there is not there, perhaps we would also not be here. (Interviewee 4)

Although these answers were in response to a question that directly referred to what they thought about their faith, there was a natural association of faith with God himself and the attribution that God was a source of strength. The strength that they refer to is both in the form of will and energy. It is physical in the sense that it provides them a burst of physical energy. It is also psychological in that it gives them a sense of motivation and it is also spiritual which explains why it is also closely related to inner strength (*lakás ng loób*) which gives them the will to carry on.

### ***Prayer as Foundation of Faith in the Migration Experience***

A very interesting point that has reverberated through all the interviews was that it seemed as though there is a minimal criterion held in the mind of the migrant so as to give the person incentive to consider oneself as religious. This is most obviously played out in the understanding of the Filipino Catholic migrant's view of and attitude towards prayer and comparing it with attending mass or the eucharist.

Interviewer: What makes you say that you are religious?

Interviewee 27: .... Even if you don't go to mass... as long as you remember God...through prayer... even if your prayer is not that lengthy as long as it comes from your heart. (Interviewee 27)

Interviewee 26: I'm not a regular churchgoer. But I pray at home.

Interviewer: Why do you think are you more comfortable at home than going to church?

Interviewee 26: Because sometimes going to church seems like it's just for show. Yes, you go to church but you have a bad attitude. So what's the purpose of hearing the word of God and yet outside you treat people badly. So it's just like you're a hypocrite. You pretend that you're holy but you misbehave. So even if somebody is not a regular churchgoer but knows good deeds and does good to others then that's better than someone who goes to mass regularly but maltreats others.

I'm not the type of person who goes to mass. Me, I would go to mass only when I really want to. It's not easy when I just get invited (by others to go to mass) when it's not of my free will. But for every day that God made, before I go to bed, before I go to work, before I eat... I pray. It doesn't matter where I am. I just stay quiet, I just pray. (Interviewee 4)

The practice of going to mass is something that is characteristic of the Catholic faith and is essential in one's conception of a Catholic identity. There seems to be a view wherein the mass can be relegated to the public sphere of religiosity and therefore it is more of an external facet of that religiosity.

Many people (Filipinos) go to mass because you see that the church is always full whenever you go to church. Wherever you go you see many people in church. But I'm not so sure if once they leave the church whether they bring with them whatever lesson they learned inside the church because people are busy. (Interviewee 11)

This external understanding of one's religiosity is contrasted with the internal practice of faith which most of the interviewees considered to be much more important. There is a perception that personal prayer is that minimal criteria for being a person of faith. Even if one did not pay a visit to the church, for as long as the person maintained communication with God through prayer, then one could consider oneself to be faithful because therein lies the locus of faith.

As for me I say, Lord, just take care of everything. Even if I don't go to mass, God is always there. Right? You already know that, it's in the heart, right? It's in the heart. Because there are people who keep going to mass but it's just nothing. So better just pray by yourself, right? Is that right or not? Because that's the way with us. Just for me, that's my belief. I'd rather pray on my own at least He (God) knows that I still (have faith in Him)... because even if I do not go to mass at least I still have communication with Him. (Interviewee 25)

For me, although it's required to go to mass and you have to go to church especially on Sundays, of course you don't have to forget your personal prayer because that's your communication with God. (Interviewee 24)

Even when you're at home, at any time, whatever you want, you pray. Even at home. That's how we do it. Even when we're at home, it's like that. (Interviewee 6)

It can be seen that there is a dichotomy between public practice (the mass) and private experience (personal prayer). And as shown by the interviews, the private and internal (*loób*) matters more than the public and external. For the Filipino migrant in Macau, even though there is the external availability or physical accessibility of churches and together with that the celebration of the mass, what seems to matter more is the faith that one holds within. It can be argued that personal prayer is both necessary and sufficient for being a person of faith.

## **Conclusion**

One of the central features of the faith of Filipino Catholic migrants involves the belief in the role that God plays in their experience as migrants. This belief essentially is about the dynamics between fatalism and self-determination. The migrants' attitudes towards these beliefs was only limited to total fatalism and shared agency with God's predetermined plans. This shows that for Filipinos, God is always a presence in the course of their life events.

The faith of Filipino migrants has varied views and expressions. In general, faith for Filipinos is not primarily anchored on morality nor is it founded on rational or intellectual grounds. Instead, the variations of faith among Filipinos relate to emotional experiences as well as experiences that are best expressed in the words of their native language. Some of the emotions associated with faith in the context of the Filipino experience include the feeling of lightness of being, the feeling of being strengthened, the comfort one gets from holding on to God, leaning upon God, and counting on God as one's fundamental support. Another emotional feeling is the fear of God which is probably the one closely related to morality although this fear is primarily founded on a strong sense of the presence of God in one's life.

For Filipino migrants, faith fundamentally lies in personal prayer as opposed to the public or social expression of religiosity such as going to mass. Filipinos maintain the practice of personal prayer which remains constant and is considered to be the bedrock of their faith over and above external rituals. This is due to the Filipino worldview and view of life that involves *loób*—the interiority that is essential to life—something that is strongly characteristic of Filipino culture.

It is highly relevant to consider an anthropological approach that takes into account language and meaning in the study of the faith of migrants. When migrants find themselves in a foreign society, their ethnic identity becomes salient and they find familiarity in the use of their own language. Studying the richness and the depth of meaning in words that themselves bear concepts and worldviews that are especially related to faith provide us with much insight and an understanding that the study of faith is so much more than the measurement provided by empirical data.

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