

Exploring the Social Space of Filipino Catholics in Japan: [De]Ghettoization

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Abstract

Filipinos go to Japan for economic reasons but as they migrate for work, they bring along with them their ethnoreligious identity and heritage. Situated as "guests" in the Church of Japan, Filipino Catholics' (FCs) ecclesial presence is marked by narratives of seclusion, marginality, and negotiation. Data are drawn from qualitative field research on selected church communities in the Archdiocese of Tokyo in Japan, namely, Koiwa, Matsudo, Akabane, and Kasai. In an attempt to explore and nuance these contested spaces, I would make use of Loic Wacquant's theorization of urban ghettos and Pierre Bourdieu's ideation of "field". To illustrate this, the paper proposes a 'diamond-quadrant' (DQ) plane that may serve as a heuristic device for analytical purposes. Results from this study suggest that the early years of FCs' negotiation (1979-the 1990s) locate the players in the right plane of contested space defined by exclusionary tendencies of swording and shielding. In the mid-2000s, there has since been a major shift of negotiation to the left plane that is characterized by inclusionary attempts of fishnet and graftage. Despite this shift, it is still a negotiated space. The vision of full integration remains an ideal objective that if unmasked of its ambiguity and hegemonic nuances may be a welcome solution to the problems that affect the Church of Japan as a whole.

Keywords: Ghetto, Migration, Religion

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Introduction

Filipinos who go to Japan for work and employment bring along their rich religious identity as Catholic Christians. Once in Japan, it is expected that they start looking for the nearest church/chapel where they can attend mass and participate in religious devotions, practices, and ceremonies. In their entire life as Filipino Catholics in a foreign country with merely 0.3% of the entire population affiliated with Catholic Christianity, theirs is not only a story of belonging to religion as an act of finding a refuge amidst the trend of non-religiosity but a story of struggle, negotiation, and contestation.

In this paper, it is argued that aside from the socio-spatial seclusion that Filipino Catholics experience in the secular (public and private) space within Japanese society, such tension is somehow extended and reproduced in the sacred (ecclesial/religious) space of the Japanese Catholic parishes/churches. Not only is the church/religion a place of refuge for discriminated migrants as many sociologists and migration experts have articulated (Dolan, 1972; Zhou, 1992; Warner and Wittner, 1998, Gibb and Rothenberg, 2000), but the sacred space has also become a locale of marginality and hostility. LeMay's (2013) field research has touched upon the Filipinas' contested space at home and workplace but has missed extending it to sacred space. Whereas marginality in the secular space is generally based on an ethnoreligious category, that is, as being both a Filipino and Catholic, the sacred space is contested by an ethnocultural category, especially when Filipinos bring their culturally-nuanced religious expressions and ethos to a Japanese parish/church at the cost of disturbing religio-cultural traditions of the host group. Although subtle and obscured, this ethnocultural tension within the ecclesial space (re)produces marginality against the Filipino Catholics since their presence is deemed an intrusion into the pre-owned sacred (ecclesial/religious) space of the dominant ethnic group. The contested local space is a challenge that beckons Asian Christianity, "In the face of complex diversities, Asian Christianity must heed both the migrants' complaint that 'they are treated as 'guests' in the Church of Tokyo and the Japanese Catholics' plea that they too no longer feel at home in church" (Francisco, 2014, p. 575). While mentioned in general terms and missing in further elaboration, this paper attempts to investigate and explore this socio-spatial contestation between two ethnoreligious groups - the Japanese Catholics and the Filipino Catholics - who are co-existing in Japan. In critically analyzing this contested sacred space, although as a micro-narrative to the Asian region, the paper hopes to contribute to the predicament of Asian Christianity, which too is socio-spatially situated in a region that is characterized by multiculturalism, multi-ethnicity, and multi-religiosity as well as affected by global trends on migration and secular urbanism among others.

Using the analytical framework on socio-spatial seclusion of urban ghettos provided by Loic Wacquant, this paper will diachronically explore the historicity of Filipino Catholics in Japan and its corresponding nuances to reveal traces and cues of marginality as well as explicit and implicit social control mechanisms employed by the superordinate upon the subordinate. Moreover, it is also of huge interest to look at how the subjugated ethnic group negotiates and strategically resists this constraint. That in the light of Wacquant's thesis on urban ghettos, this paper articulates these existing mechanisms of control and hostility in hope of finding whether Filipinos' socio-spatial configuration has already reached the ghetto/anti-ghetto stage, even momentarily, or has simply demonstrated a push or pull mobility over the extent of their existence within a highly contested space.

The Filipino Catholics in Japan and their historicized negotiation

Filipinos' entry into the Japanese socio-spatial space started as early as the 1900s when Filipinos have been regular fixtures in the socio-spatial space of Japanese society with reputable admiration from the host in terms of their musical talent and boxing skills (Suzuki, 2008b). They were often invited to perform and on both the musical stage and the boxing arena, the Filipinos had been regarded as great entertainers. But all of these changed in the late 70s when boxing lost its popularity and female entertainers began to crowd the night scenes in Japan's urban settlements. The entry of the female entertainers in 1979, the so-called Japayuki Year One, is where this paper begins its attempt to historicize Filipinos' entry into negotiated sacred space with the Japanese.

The Japayuki phenomenon is believed to be pre-conditioned by the great economic progress of postwar Japan. Owing to a more liberalized overseas travel granted by their government, many Japanese men during the mid-60s traveled to Manila as tourists and had established intimate contacts with many Filipinas who were then working in sex industries (Eviota, 1992). As Japan's economy expanded in this era, many Japanese men started to earn more money to spend in hostess bars but many Japanese girls from these same bars left to apply for corporate jobs in the cities. In response, the government allowed more entertainer visas for Filipinas to work in these establishments, differentiated as snack bars (*sunakku*), pubs (*pabu*), cabarets (*kyabare*), and clubs (*kurabu*) (Faier, 2009). Moreover, Piper contends that "Japanese immigration laws were deliberately weakened to allow such women in on special visas so Japanese men would no longer have to go abroad on sex tours to Southeast Asia..." (Piper, 2000, p. 27). As bar hostesses, Suzuki (2008a) observes that their primary function is not necessarily "sex work" (coitus) but to facilitate social intercourse through frivolous conversations. Due to increasing demand, soon, illegal recruitment and underground activity led to undocumented Filipinas working in prostitution and left an adverse effect on the image of Filipina entertainers that were usually associated with sex jobs (Faier, 2009). As their number grew until the early years of the 2000s, tighter measures of control had also been enforced by the host society.

Gendered and racialized, these Filipinas were left marginalized and constrained in both societal and spatial existence. Japanese society generally looks at certain races and nationalities as uniquely qualified for certain kinds of labor and Filipino (illegal) sex workers were considered at the bottom of the so-called "racialized hierarchy" (Shipper, 2008).

In an attempt to counter such anomic existence, they sought religion as a way to impose a new meaningful order upon reality (Berger, 1967). Religion acts as a kind of refuge for "displaced" migrants in a foreign nation (Komai, 2001). Williams (1988) even argues that migrants are on all accounts more religious in a foreign country than in their place of origin. But since their illegal status in Japan left them vulnerable as outsiders, they avoided public gatherings as they can be an easy target for raids and arrests while fully aware too of the need to build closer relationships with their co-ethnics. In their search for a space where they could get together and be 'Filipina', they went to religion to express their longings and reconnect with their cultural cosmologies.

As early as 1960, the Catholic Bishops Conference of Japan (CBCJ) has since acknowledged the presence and needs of Catholic migrants when it created the Commission on Migration which since then has taken several forms and adaptations. Currently, all migrants' concerns

are handled by the Catholic Commission of Japan for Migrants, Refugees, and People on the Move.

In the Archdiocese of Tokyo, the Catholic Tokyo International Center (CTIC) was created in 1990 specifically to cater to the needs of foreign Catholics. In its early years, CTIC's operation had been merely focused on providing legal and social assistance (immigration concerns, marital counseling, and more) to many migrant workers, especially Filipinos. Only in the early years of the 2000s, CTIC has since included a more pastoral approach in its apostolate to the migrants like the provision of seminars on liturgical, eucharistic, catechetical, and choir ministries.

In that same year too, the Franciscan Philippine Center (FPC) was established with Fr. Ely Adel, OFM, a Filipino Franciscan priest, as its director. Although coinciding with the archdiocesan-created CTIC, FPC is more exclusive to Filipino Catholics' concerns as well as more pastoral in its programs. Fr. Adel was tireless in his desire to serve the Filipino Catholics even outside the Tokyo area; saying masses as far as Saitama, Yokohama, and Chiba areas and providing catechetical and formation programs to many of them. Many of today's Filipino church-based communities owe their early years of formation to the zealous pastoral dedication of this priest.

Before Filipinos were able to establish their church-based communities, they started in the mid-'90s with house-to-house evangelization where a small group of Filipinas would bring along with them the statue of the Virgin Mary and would regularly visit several households, usually those with Filipinas who was then married to Japanese nationals. Once inside the house, they sang sacred songs, prayed the rosary, read the Bible, and shared life/faith experiences which were often filled with painful stories of loneliness and isolation on foreign soil. Feeling the need to have a more permanent place to gather and meet socio-spiritual needs, Fr. Adel encouraged these Filipinas to ask their respective (Japanese) parish priests if they could be accommodated for English/Tagalog mass in their parishes. While not everyone was successful, many Japanese parish priests had been open to allowing these Filipinos to have a mass of their own. Mullins (2011, p. 171) reiterates this inability of Japanese priests to pastorally care for foreigners due to the language barrier and that "only by inviting an outside priest can some of the smaller churches provide an occasional non-Japanese mass for the immigrants."

Towards the late 90s, the FPC had some internal problems and along with the departure of Fr. Adel back to the Philippines, its office was transferred from Roppongi to Kiyose and changed its name to Philippine Pastoral Center (PPC) by the year 2000. With CTIC's restructuring to include increased involvement in pastoral ministry to foreign Catholics during that same year, PPC's operations became mere duplication of the archdiocesan office. Soon PPC redefined its pastoral projects to solely focusing on organizing pilgrimages and home evangelization ministries but due to a lack of resources and absence of priestly guidance, it soon found itself without an office. And as many of its core leaders were also at the helm of guiding their own respective Filipino church-based communities in their nascent stages, PPC's structural vacuum was inevitable and by 2010, it changed its name to Home Evangelization Ministry (HEM). Without a permanent address, HEM core members meet occasionally in some members' houses, in restaurants, or any other public space especially when organizing pilgrimages for some parish-based Filipino Catholics.

As Filipino church-based communities and transparochial groups (El Shaddai, Couples for Christ (CFC), and Alliance of Two Hearts among others) started to emerge in the late 90s to early 2000s, CTIC organized the Gathering of Filipino Groups and Communities (GFGC) in 2003 "as a way of uniting different Filipino groups present in parishes within the Archdiocese of Tokyo". Just a few years ago, however, the archdiocese strengthened its call for full integration of foreigners in the church and discouraged transparochialism by asking individuals and groups to register in their respective parishes. Heeding this call, the GFGC began encouraging Filipino transparochial groups to realign themselves to a certain parish for if not GFGC would not welcome them anymore. Around two years ago, GFGC proposed to change its name to Gathering of Filipino Catholic Communities (GFCC); dropping the Filipino groups in response to the archdiocesan policy of integration. Although not yet approved as of writing, the name GFGC is still currently used but with an already obvious absence of these transparochial groups in their general assemblies and gatherings as of late.

In the early years of the 2000s, a Filipino priest assigned in the Chiba area had been regularly saying mass to four Filipino communities located in the parishes of Matsudo, Ichikawa, Koiwa, and Toyoshiki. In his desire to strengthen the network and linkage of these four communities under his pastor-ship and in the process build a better support system and engagement as an inter-community association, he formed the MICHIKOTO United in 2005. Having its own set of officers and board members from the four communities, MICHIKOTO United organizes annual social events and cultural gatherings (dinner for a cause, bowling tournament, bus tours, pilgrimages, and Filipino Community day among others), aside from its usual spiritual and religious activities.

As Filipino Catholics continue to gain a more stable and recognized presence in many churches in the archdiocese, many of the active members however are old. It also does not help that many of the bicultural children of these Filipinas have become more Japanese than Filipinos; not only in language and cultural behavior but also in terms of religious orientation. Tighter immigration laws since 2005 did not help replenish the community with young blood.

A diachronic sketch of the Filipino Catholics in the Archdiocese of Tokyo enables this paper to locate in a kind of timeline the evolution of these communities and how the social space of ecclesia hides more than what it reveals. It can be said that most of today's Filipino church-based communities owe their foundation to the collective initiative of Fr. Adel and the core members of FPC as well as the openness of most Japanese parish priests and the welcoming environment provided by the archdiocesan center. Born out of difficult negotiation, even their socio-spatial existence in today's sacred space still bears tensions. In the next section, this paper will zero in on these contested discourses and how the Filipino Catholic communities, more than a product of history, are also active agents in the negotiated sacred space.

Traces and Cues of De/Ghettoization in Wacquant's analytical frame

In 1997, the Archbishop of Tokyo Cardinal Peter Seiichi Shirayanagi raise two important issues facing the Church then: the "guest-identity" of Filipino Catholics in Japan as well as the vision of full integration of foreigners in the Church. The first implies the current situation; the second is its desired objective... and within this gap is a negotiated space. In Wacquant's frame, the continuous treatment of Filipino Catholics as "guests" with controlled movement, confined activity, and stigmatized identity inside the sacred space are attributes of a "ghettoizing" tendency. On the contrary, it can be construed that the initiative of the archdiocesan center to accept them as full members of the Church with empowered status,

greater access to parish resources, and recognized presence features towards "deghettoization". In this section, this paper attempts to analyze these movements and configurations so that a clearer articulation of these negotiated discourses may bring about more tangible solutions for the current problems facing the Church of Japan.

As for a clearer understanding of the meaning and nuances associated with this "guest-identity" attribute, this paper attempts to explain it in light of Wacquant's four criteria of an urban ghetto: stigma, constraint, spatial confinement, and institutional encasement. The stigma that these Filipino Catholics have experienced is multifaceted. In terms of race, they are considered a foreigner in the lower hierarchy. In terms of work and employment, they are found in those socially regarded as demeaning jobs. In terms of religion, they are considered a minority. Japan's long history of insulation from foreign influence and its myth of cultural homogeneity, as embedded in its *Nihonjinron* (Japanese national and cultural identity) ethos, has classified foreigners into a racialized hierarchy with Filipinos at the bottom. In terms of employment, one cannot forget the historical stigma experience by *Japayukis* (Yoder, 2011). Besides, Filipinos have been usually employed in less-attractive jobs defined by the 3K characteristics of *kitsui* (difficult), *kiken* (dangerous), and *kitanai* (dirty). The constraint employed upon Filipinos in Japan is in the areas of culture and religion. In sacred space, Zarate observes, "Even if they [Filipinos] are Catholics and have the right to use the church and its facilities, they are just given time to use them under certain conditions" (Zarate, 2008, p. 27). For Faier (2009), Filipinos are looked upon as completely different from the Japanese. On spatial confinement, one of the most obvious expressions of this is found in the way Sunday masses are scheduled. Filipinos' Sunday gathering is strictly separated from the Japanese gathering in order not to disturb or infringe on the host's space. In many parishes, the morning Sunday gathering is allocated for the host while the "guests" are allowed to have their religious ceremony in the afternoon when the entire Japanese community is already finished with their own. Filipino Catholics are also institutionally encased. Fourth, in terms of institutional encasement, Filipino Catholics are pushed into the periphery of secular and even sacred spaces and have since thrived and have gained a sense of autonomy; organizing themselves into parallel structures "with a distinct and duplicative set of institutions enabling the group thus cloistered to reproduce itself within its assigned perimeter" (Wacquant, 2012, p. 24]. In its early years, there was strong social control (sword) imposed upon by the host unto them as a kind of external closure. Through this, Filipinos have learned to further strengthen their communal ties and collectivism through internal bonding (shield). Filipino Catholics elected their leaders, organized spiritual and cultural events within the sacred space, coordinated with Filipino priests for their masses and spiritual activities, and even raise their funds and resources. Soon enough, this newfound stability of Filipino communities caused tension with the Japanese Catholics as the latter considered the Filipinos to be "a parish within a parish," suspected of separating from the church and setting out a new ethnic church (Mateo, 2003; Makoto, 2016).

This duality of external hostility and internal affinity is considered an exclusionary strategy used by both parties in their pursuit to be separated and distinct from each of them. But this did not last long. Soon, the Archdiocese center recognized the increasing number of foreigners in the Church vis-a-vis the dwindling and aging Japanese Catholic population. At this point, the shielding resource of the Filipino Catholics became more powerful than the swording capacity of the host. The host has since become more compliant for the cause of integration but long years of isolation from the outside and a more stable communal bond that has since been formed within these Filipino communities have made any integrative attempt still replete with caution and calculation, at least on the part of the subordinate. Filipino

Catholics for a time have enjoyed this "protective device insofar as it relieves its members from constant contact with the dominant..." (Wacquant, 2012, p. 25). But with a low supply of new Filipino migrants after the 2005 immigration law revision that could have infused new membership to churches and at the same time the obvious need of introducing their bicultural Nihongo-speaking children to religion, Filipino Catholics have acknowledged the urgency of integration with the Church of Japan and the futility of remaining isolated from it. Since the mid-2000s, the Church of Japan and lately the Filipino communities have moved from exclusionary space of ghettoizing strategies to the inclusionary space of deghettoizing tendencies. While it remains a vision until now, there have been improvements and developments, although highly negotiated and still contested.

As for the vision of integration, it is observed that post-2005 social and ecclesial conditions that include the low supply of new and long-term Filipino immigrants, aging demographics, and non-religiosity of the youth have urged the Church of Japan to desegregate and become more inclusive. The Church has begun discussing measures to admit and integrate foreigners. For many years, the Church was moving toward two societies - one Japanese, one Filipino - separate and unequal. It can be said that recent developments have shifted the arena of negotiation from the right side of the DQ plane that features exclusionary tendencies to the left side of it which is defined by inclusionary strategies. The superordinate group (top) is employing the "fishnet" method while the subordinate (below) is utilizing a "graftage" method.

Within the fishnet realm, the Japanese Church is viewed as casting its net as far and wide in hope of integrating as many foreign Catholics as possible. As early as the 90s, the archdiocese gradually built structures (like CTIC) to cater to their needs which more often than not were related to employment and immigration concerns, especially since there had been a lot of illegal Filipino workers back then. When migration concerns soon stabilized, CTIC realigned its focus on the pastoral needs of the emerging Filipino Catholic communities by providing them with formation seminars on liturgical service, catechesis, and lay ministries. In a message by Archbishop Okada of Tokyo in 2008, he shares, "Half of the members of Catholic churches are now foreign nationals. We presume the number of migrants will continue to increase. It is time for us to receive migrants more positively..." (Archdiocese of Tokyo, 2009). However, these initiatives are from the policy-makers standpoint. The more obvious gap is found in its full exercise at the parish level where most foreign Catholics gather together. Bishop Koda of Tokyo identifies two major obstacles: the Japanese clergy's English language handicap that deters good communication with the foreigners and the spatiotemporal cleft manifested in the Sunday mass schedule with the Japanese mass in the morning and the foreign mass in the afternoon, which reinforces split between Japanese and foreign Catholics that prevents them to make contact and meet. On the part of the Japanese, there seems to be no problem with ethnolinguistic masses by Filipinos. While an English mass is more encouraged to cater to a more international audience, a Tagalog mass is generally not discouraged. Overall, there is a considerable improvement in the way Japanese Catholics have been relating to Filipino Catholics.

Inside the graftage realm, Filipino communities have gradually shifted from the comfort of the shield to a more inclusive direction of "inserting" themselves into the Church of Japan in such a way that these two ethnic groups will unite and continue their growth. While Filipino Catholics are slowly inching their way out of the "fence of seclusion", it still bears a lot of disorientation and confusion brought about by the historical baggage of marginality and hostility. For one, the full meaning of integration remains ambiguous to many of them. Does

it mean foregoing Tagalog masses? Does it include the dissolution of Filipino church-based communities? Would that prevent us from celebrating religio-cultural expressions? Even if most of these permanently-settled Filipinos can understand a Nihongo mass, they still feel more at ease and comfortable with a Tagalog mass. More than the issue of linguistic affinity, Tagalog mass offers them an overall atmosphere of festive celebration characterized by animated music, warmth, and solidarity, which sadly is absent in Japanese mass.

Although the topic of Tagalog mass remains a shielding strategy for most Filipino Catholics, the predicament of the aging Filipino Catholic population and the confused religious identity of their Japanese Filipino (JF) children have become a compelling motivation to adhere to and cooperate toward the integration process. The greying population may be expected given the lack of new permanent Filipino migrants but what is alarming is the absence of young members in the church who are expected to come from the sons and daughters of these married Filipino Catholics.

In light of the proposed DQ plane which can aid in locating the positions of certain players and their strategies of negotiation within a certain Bourdieusian field, this paper can determine the shifting trend of contestation. Brought about by factors within the sacred space and even outside it, both the Japanese Catholics and Filipino Catholics have significantly moved from the right plane of exclusion (sword/shield binary) to the left plane of inclusion (fishnet/graftage binary). Today's negotiated sacred space is tilted more toward the issue of inclusion. To what extent would the superordinate accommodate diversity? To what extent is the subordinate willing to accede? This paper can reveal traces and cues of this attempt to "deghettoize" by both sides. Still, a highly contested space that is dynamic and progressing, future research may delve into its success or failure but it is safe to conclude that at this stage both parties are more open to the idea of full integration, although it remains ambiguous and contentious.

Conclusion

For many years, Filipino Catholics in Japan have been struggling to express their religious heritage and cosmologies in a way that is openly Filipino. With a theoretical foundation from Wacquant's ideation on urban ghettos as well as Bourdieu's concept of the field, this paper can construct a DQ plane diagram that aids in reconstructing social postures in the historicized arena of negotiation. Through this heuristic device, the paper finds out that the early years of negotiation (the 80s-90s) locate the players in the right plane of contested space defined by exclusionary tendencies of swording and shielding. In the mid-200s, there has since been a major shift of negotiation to the left plane that is characterized by inclusionary attempts of fishnet and graftage.

Despite this shift, it is still a negotiated space. The vision of full integration remains an ideal objective that if unmasked of its ambiguity and hegemonic nuances may be a welcome solution to the problems that affect the Church of Japan as a whole. It is a process that will take commitment from both parties. While the initial steps have been undertaken, how these result in successful integration remains to be seen.

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