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COMMON GROUND

The Filipino Catholics in Japan and Their Historicized Narrative of Struggle

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Abstract: For Filipinos in Japan, their long-historicized existence in Japan has forced them to continually (re)adjust and (re)articulate their own sociocultural norms, particularly in secular areas like workplaces, societal institutions, marketplaces, and even in their own domestic familial spaces. This article argues, however, that this narrative of struggle is somehow extended even in the confines of religious and ecclesial spaces of Catholic parishes and churches. In this light, this article attempts to articulate the current status and predicament of Filipino Catholics in Japan, particularly in the Archdiocese of Tokyo, where the author spent ten months of field work in selected parishes, churches, and Filipino Catholic communities. It seeks to offer a fresh and updated analysis of their ethnoreligious stories given the emerging situational predicament of increasing nonreligiosity of society and the aging population of Filipino Catholics and their disinterested bicultural children. In response to current demographic crisis and future uncertainty, the Archdiocese has responded by initiating a call for "full integration" that embraces the image of a multicultural church in Japan to acknowledge the presence and contribution of foreign Catholics in Japan. However, this has been received with suspicion and anxiety, particularly from Filipino Catholics. While attempting to expose its ambiguity, this article also highlights the interesting situation of Filipino Catholics as religious in nonreligious Japan—despite this, they have reconfigured the way they express and practice their faith. Their historicized attempt to survive and negotiate as a religious "other" within a constrained and confined socio-spatial plane reveals interesting dynamics and opportunities for renewed dialogue.

Keywords: Migration, Full Integration, Archdiocese of Tokyo, Religion, Bicultural Children, Multicultural Church

Introduction

Many who have known Japan from tourist desks, promotional materials, and random brochures marvel at the structural aesthetics of the Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines as well as the number of events and festivals of a religious nature. Those who have read Japan's history are aware of the rich and colorful anecdotes of the Shogun and the Samurai and how these powerful institutions were intimately connected with Japan's religious traditions and ideals. For many outsiders, these are enough reasons to believe that Japanese are religious. A closer look, however, reveals otherwise.

One can observe how the Japanese exclusively associate their birth/life ritual with Shintoism and funeral/death rites with Buddhism—"they are born Shinto and die Buddhists" (Kisala 2006, 3). But it is also claimed that they "live nonreligious and wed Christian" (LeFebvre 2015, 197), which suggests an emerging trend especially among the young and secular-thinking Japanese who are increasingly attracted to the rites and aesthetics of Christian wedding although clearly uncommitted to subscribe to its attached Christian theological meaning and value. In fact, modern Japanese do not associate themselves with any religion at all (Ishii 2007). Although the Japanese observe religious rituals and participate in age-old traditions in shrines and temples, theirs is "more ritualistic than religious" (Suggate 1996, 16). Their "religious" participation does not embrace the same kind of religious fervor and understanding that Christians in general demonstrate. They may appear more "religious" in how they are too refined and formal with their gestures and movements but, probing more closely, they are more concerned with the correct performance of the ritual and not with what meaning they can derive from it. Lest accused of oversimplification, this nonreligiosity among the Japanese is nuanced and needs to be further explicated and differentiated.

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Given the extent of scholarship that have delved into the situation of Filipino Catholics in Japan over the course of time, this article is unique because it articulates their ethnoreligious existence in the background of Japan's emerging nonreligious context and its consequential impact on their bicultural children. It is believed that this new situation has redefined and reshaped the socio-religious narrative of Filipino Catholics in Japan. The Philippines is a predominantly Catholic country where socio-cultural norms and traditions have been dominantly influenced by Catholic cosmology and ethos. Their migration to Japan means their religio-cultural habitus and ethos would have to negotiate with the more dominant nonreligious normative of Japanese society. Curiously, these Filipino Catholics have brought along with them their strong religious Catholic fervor from their home country despite the expanding nonreligious character of the Japanese society. Being religious in a nonreligious country, this article further argues that their historical presence and life within the religious space have been characterized by negotiation, contestation, and struggle.

The significance of this article rests on its analytical discourse of contested space between and among ethnoreligious communities within a country that is known to be nonreligious. The study contributes to emerging situations of diversity and pluralism brought about by global mobility of people for work, migration, academics, and leisure. With national borders getting more porous, economic development needing more migrant workers, universities welcoming more international students, international travel and tourism experiencing high turnout, and technology shifting to digitalization, there is not enough to hinder cultural diversity and pluralism in most countries today. Certainly, what is taking place in Japan mirrors similar situations in other countries with increasing number of migrants who bring along with them not only their cultural praxis, but also their religious norms and traditions. This study contributes to scholarly discussion on the nexus between religion and migration particularly on how ethnic minorities like Filipinos are negotiating within the contested space of religion and ecclesiastical institutions.

It is the objective of this article to articulate this redefined discourse of Filipino Catholics in Japan and how shifts in social and public policies and norms have impacted their historicized existence. As context, there will be brief discussions on the nature and state of Filipino religiosity, the nonreligious character of Japanese society and Japanese religious behavior as more of an expression of being ritualistic than religious. The entire study is based from the author's ten months of field work in the Archdiocese of Tokyo and document review, aided and supported by a review of literature and studies from leading scholars who have engaged in similar themes and topics. The main section deals with the struggle of the Filipino Catholics within the religious and ecclesial space of the Archdiocese, particularly their aging demographic and their disinterested bicultural children. It is important to address, too, how they negotiate and adjust in a land where cultural homogeneity is still a prevailing cosmology and nonreligiousness a popular trend. Between this state of marginality and that ideal status of social recognition is a liminal space of ambiguity and confusion as to how Filipino Catholic religiosity shall be maintained within the Japanese setting, especially because many of them are spouses of Japanese nationals who want their bicultural children to embody Japanese religio-cultural norms. Towards the end, there will be a brief discussion on the call of the Archdiocese of Tokyo toward "full integration" and the ambiguity that it contains.

Filipino Religiosity: Catholicism in Philippines

As a predominantly Catholic country where 81 percent of Filipinos have identified themselves as Catholics, there is strong Catholic presence even outside the ecclesial space in the Philippines. Socio-cultural norms are greatly shaped and influenced by Catholic normative ethos. Academic institutions, including those government-run schools, have allowed catechesis and religious education that have a strong Catholic orientation. While the constitution is clear on separation of Church and State and the State's non-endorsement of any religion, Filipinos' traditional moral convictions have been primordially religion-based. Religious ideals are strongly embedded in

social traditions, festival celebrations, ethical norms and familial practices among Filipinos. Filipinos' strongly Catholic foundation is credited to more than 400 years of Christianity since the missionary arrival of Spanish friars in 1521.

From birth until death, Filipinos have strongly identified personal growth and maturity within Catholic sacramental cosmology. Filipinos are born Catholic (Christian) through baptism, they wed in Catholic matrimony, and die Catholic through funeral rites. This deep religious embeddedness is the reason why many Filipinos, even when they migrate to other countries, have brought along with them their religious ethos and habitus. Even when in foreign countries, they find refuge in Catholic religious spaces not only to express their faith, but also to reconnect with their culture back home.

Deconstructing Nonreligiosity in the Japanese Context

What does it mean to be nonreligious? A quick look at its basic definition from various dictionaries and encyclopedia suggests that there are various nuances associated with the meaning of the word "nonreligious." It is importantly fair then to avoid interpreting nonreligiosity of the Japanese along Western categories or understand it outside and detached from the very context of the Japanese lifeworld. In short, the nonreligious character of the Japanese can only be fairly understood within its unique culture and cosmology.

The article posits five explications in an attempt to provide a nuanced definition of the Japanese nonreligiosity. First, it can simply mean that Japanese do not practice or are devoted to any specific religion. Since their concept of religion refers to organized and revealed religion like that of Abrahamic religions, their religious mind is different from those. For the Japanese, religion is closely intertwined with their culture; any shrine visits like the New Year festival are regarded more as cultural tradition than a religious observance (Betros 2013). Shintoism itself as defined by its authorities is regarded as a "nonreligious" institution (Mullins 1998, 18). Second, being nonreligious is defined as a normative ideal among contemporary Japanese (LeFebvre 2015, 197). Third, its prefix "non-" connotes a pragmatic preference to neutrality rather than an antithetical stance to religion. Nonreligiosity is not being anti-religion. Japanese may not be fully knowledgeable of other religions but they are generally respectful of them. In fact, Betros (2013) cites figures in 2011 from the Cultural Affairs Agency that lists about 180,000 groups across the country with licenses as religious corporations. While Japan is deemed a fertile ground for emergence of religious cults and sects, most Japanese remain critical and suspicious of them especially if believers of a certain cult propagate terror and social chaos just like what the cult Aum Shinrikyo did on March 20, 1995, where twelve people died and thousands got injured due to a deadly sarin gas attack in some parts of the Tokyo subway. Its aftermath is believed to further reinforce the appeal of nonreligiosity as a personal option or even a social obligation that can contribute in maintenance of social order and peace. It is considered a vote for security against any possible form of religious terror and extremism: "Nonreligiousness is a negation not of religion but of forms of religion that are typically considered dangerous to society or weird, foreign, or inappropriate" (LeFebvre 2015, 197). Fourth, it is believed that nonreligiosity of Japanese is a testament of a superior culture that disallows any conflict from religious differences and helps maintain a peaceful and attractive society. To proclaim nonreligiosity is a proud choice and one that carries a social capital in a society that puts strong value on honor and reputation based on social compliance and uniformity. Fifth, nonreligiosity has over time evolved to include the nuance of a "personal faith" that is not bound by any religious structure and affiliation. Simply put, it is a convenient way of not belonging to any structural religion with all its rules, obligations, and codes and allows one to express religious sensibilities through personal choice and comfort. Ironically, LeFebvre (2015, 199) suggests that in this particular nuance, "nonreligious attitudes may actually facilitate more, rather than less, religious behavior." In the end, what this nuanced explication on Japanese nonreligiosity shows is how it provides the Japanese an option to be non-exclusive and less polarizing to an extent that they can maintain a

certain sense of appearing "normal" or "typical" versus negative social labels of "deviance" and "weirdness".

Japanese as More Ritualistic Than Religious

When Japanese attend and participate in religious events, their intention is to socially conform in a society where cultural traditions are regarded with respect and collective uniformity is an ideal (Betros 2013). Any inference to it as religiously motivated or fiducially expressed is deemed non-essential, unimportant, or blatantly disregarded. They simply do not see or attach any religious meaning to "religious" practices that they perform. Perhaps the source of confusion of many observers is the meticulous and careful regard by the Japanese in their performance of these religious rites and gestures. Their eye for details and the rigorous preparation that go with most rituals as well as the observance of the proper dress and attire to wear to a particular event will certainly be viewed by many as evidence of a deep religious attitude to a god or deity.

Being more ritual-focused, the performative aspect of Japanese "religiosity" is expressed through correct performance of rites and rituals. Suggate (1996, 16) adds that "the numerous festivals reflect more a love of theatre than any concern for morality," implying how Japanese have placed greater value and emphasis on the cultic aspect of religious practices than religious codes and ethos. Shinto festivals reveal their love for theatrical performance rather than any authentic concern for moral observance, where adherents are more concerned with the correct performance of rituals than any ethical codes. Buddhist funeral rites and the annual memorial services for the deceased are also undertaken in ritualized performance led by Buddhist priests. Highly external in expression than internal, "religiosity" is satisfied with propriety of dress, gestures, bodily postures, and movements, as well as observance of protocols and cultural nuances. Reader and Tanabe (1998, 129) describe this kind of religious expression as "affective sincerity." They further postulate that when the Japanese participate in religious ritual, they care less about its cognitive background than the rigor of the procedure. They may not intellectually understand the rite, but if they faithfully adhere to and perform the rigor of the ritual, it provides them a certain sense of contentment knowing fully well that they have complied with the cultural tradition. Ebaugh and Chafetz (1999, 593) even contend that this ritual-oriented behavior is extended in domestic space when honoring home shrines and altars.

Another way to look at it is due to close association of Japanese culture and religion. Their participation suggests more of their compliance to a cultural norm expressed through performance of religious rites and rituals. Since culture and religion are understood as a whole and not separately, participation in a temple rite for example could very well be treated and perceived by the Japanese as a cultural practice inasmuch as several layers in Japanese culture are also infused with religious themes. For them, there is no dichotomy between religion and culture (society).

The Filipino Catholics in Japan: A Historicized Narrative of Struggle

Amid this nonreligious trend and peculiar Japanese understanding of religious behavior are the Filipino Catholics whose stories of migration are historically connected with their desire for economic freedom and stability, which they sadly cannot avail in their home country. Part of their coping mechanism amidst a culturally strange non-Christian society, Filipinos seek refuge in the confines of Catholic churches where they can somehow feel connected and their sorrow is somehow remedied even momentarily, or so they thought. Even in this ecclesial and religious space, Filipino Catholics have historically been treated as "guests" whose participation and membership is still regarded with suspicion and caution; they are perceived somehow by the host group (Japanese Catholics) as different, and their entry is deemed as intrusion into a space they have long fought for to be their own given the painful and bloody history of Catholicism in Japan since the sixteenth century (Francisco 2014).

In the light of this guest-identity of the Filipino Catholics in Japan, the author attempts to articulate and define what appears to be a situation of ethnoreligious conflict or contestation between the Japanese Catholics and the Filipino Catholics. Through a ten-month sojourn in Tokyo in 2016, the author visited many churches with Filipino Catholic communities and observed them. The two criteria in selecting parishes in the Archdiocese of Tokyo were having an established and recognized Filipino Catholic community in the parish and a regularly-scheduled religious communal activity (mass, novena, block rosary, etc.) expressed in Filipino (Tagalog) language. In consideration of all constraints and limitations, the field areas have been trimmed to four churches—namely, Akabane, Koiwa, Matsudo, and Kasai.

The gendered demographic of the field areas shows women outnumbering the men. In a religious space, women are more likely to engage and participate because religious values and praxis resonate more with their predisposition to expressive values when men's inclination to instrumental values finds less consonance with anything that religion offers (De Vaus and McAllister 1987). Most of these Filipinas are either married to Japanese men or divorced from them and, because of that, these women have achieved a more stable status in Japan.

Looking back to where they all started, these Filipinas began migrating to Japan mainly for economic reasons. But they brought along with them their religious faith and life. From a position of dominant majority in their native country to being part of a subordinated minority in Japan, Filipino Catholics must learn how to negotiate. With most of them employed (full-time or part-time) as employees in the industrial and service-oriented sectors, it would be wrong to limit any analysis of migration narratives along mere economic lines because migration includes a human dimension (International Organization for Migration 2009). Religion serves as comfort and refuge for these Filipino migrants where "the centrality of religion to immigrant communities can be summarized as the search for refuge, respectability, and resources" (Hirschman 2004, 1228). Unlike before, Filipino Catholics have more opportunities nowadays in attending Sunday mass in a language that they not only understand, but that also reminds them of home and cultural identity; the presence of Tagalog masses has truly made them feel at home, inspired, and empowered.

To narrate and locate the shifting religious struggle of Filipino Catholics in Japan, particularly in Tokyo, a historicized exposition is deemed necessary, with the year 2005 as the focal point. That year marked the promulgation of stricter immigration law in Japan that tightened the issuance of entertainer visas as well as entry of undocumented aliens. With it was a more intensified detection and deportation of those who overstayed their visas and illegal workers in Japan, including Filipinos. But since Japan must address its aging population and low birth rate, Japan has relaxed its labor-import control on job categories that have short supply of laborers, such as medical doctors and nurses. In 2006, the Japan-Philippine Economic Partnership Agreement (JPEPA) was signed; this paved the way for employment of Filipino nurses in Japan's healthcare industry. These shifting trends and textures in Filipino labor migration have significant impact too in the formation, existence, and continuity of Filipino Catholic communities.

Looking back at the historical narrative of Filipino Catholics in Japan particularly in the Archdiocese of Tokyo, this article divides their story into two phases, with year 2005 as the historical marker. In the pre-2005 phase, Filipino Catholics' religio-ecclesial story was about its struggle for recognition as an ethnic church-based group in various parishes. The post-2005 phase exposes, for most part, an enjoyment of a certain degree of stability and recognition but that they are faced with a new form of struggle—that of longevity and sustainability given aging Filipinos, a lack of new Filipino migrant workers, and religiously disinterested bicultural youth.

Pre-2005: A Struggle for Recognition and Cultural Identity

Long before the entry of Filipina entertainers, Filipinos had been frequent visitors to Japan either as musicians (bands) or as boxers as early as the prewar period in the 1900s (Suzuki 2008).

Mostly men, these musicians were well-reputed individuals who were highly admired by the Japanese for their musicality. The Filipino boxers were also brought in to cater to the growing popularity of boxing among Japanese men and later inspired them to embrace boxing as well. In both the platforms of the musical stage and the boxing arena, Japanese audiences were "entertained" by Filipino visitors. Their brand of entertainment was one that was highly appreciated and esteemed with favor.

In the 1970s, however, a unique form of entertainment emerged that coincided with the decline of boxing's popularity and the exodus of Japanese women to seek higher-paying corporate jobs in the urban centers and cities. With Japan gaining huge economic progress, several Japanese men enjoyed having a surplus of money to spend on night clubs and club entertainers as ways to de-stress and relax after a very tiring workday. But with Japanese girls opting out of the club work and choosing instead to seek daytime white-collar jobs, Filipina girls had been recruited to satiate this growing demand for club entertainers. Suzuki (2008) shares that 1979 was the so-called "Japayuki Year One," during which Filipina female entertainers began arriving; this migration reached its peak in the early 2000s. According to the 2000 data provided by the Ministry of Justice, there were around 53,847 registered aliens with entertainer visas who were mainly Filipinas. This number though did not reflect the real number, as many Filipina entertainers entered Japan through backdoor (illegal) channels and false documentation. At some point, entertainers were the largest residence-status group among foreign workers in Japan; they were noticeably women and were socially regarded with disfavor and suspicion due to their illegal status and ties with Japanese gangs like the *yakuzas* (Shipper 2008).

Japan society's racialized hierarchy and patriarchy rendered these Filipinas in the margins. Their movement was constrained; their time was confined; their identity was stigmatized. For Shipper (2008, 25), Japan's cultural view that "certain races and nationalities are uniquely qualified for certain kinds of labor" endorses a hegemonic society. Shipper (2008, 46) continues: "Overall, legal Asian workers including trainees and entertainers are ranked at the bottom of the racialized hierarchy because they have no Japanese associations (bloodline, birthplace, or marriage) and—unlike foreign students and English teachers—are not well protected by their governments."

Berger (1967) points out that peoples' inclination towards religion is somehow bolstered by their search for meaning amidst anomic existence. For many of these Filipinas, religion has provided them a kind of refuge from being "displaced" in a foreign nation (Komai 2001; Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000; Warner and Wittner 1998; Herberg 1960). It was in a religious space of a church or parish where momentary freedom to get together and be "Filipina" made them at least get connected to home and able to relive their culture through religious expressions and social gatherings. More particularly in their early years, in the 1980s, Filipinas mostly attended Sunday masses but were not duly recognized as part of the parish. They were mere churchgoers whose presence and activity in the parish ground was spatially confined only in mass attendance and after-mass *salu-salo* (meal fellowship) or *tiangge* (food stalls). Besides, they did not see any valid reason to be more active in the church beyond Sunday mass attendance, as their night job extended until the weekend and that their stay in Japan was irregular, short-term, or even illegal.

Although deprived of ecclesial space to practice religious beliefs, their religious faith was unwavering. Early Filipinas would perform house-to-house evangelization and host private gatherings. More like a block rosary, a group of Filipinas would visit the house or unit of a Filipina housewife or resident and with them a statue of the Virgin Mary. In that house, they would pray the rosary, read the Bible, share personal reflection and stories, and sing songs. A table fellowship that served Filipino dishes and meals would be shared together. For some Filipinas, even their night bar workplaces would be adorned with religious statues/images just so they could find a way to express religious faith and belief. In her field account, Faier noted an interesting anecdote when she visited a group of Filipinas living and working in an *omise* (bar): "I stopped by to visit Elsa, Rose, and Victoria. The preparations for the night were complete, and

we chatted as we waited for customers to arrive. I happened to notice that the statues of the Santo Niño decorating the bar had been moved to a new, more prominent spot, and that led me to ask if the statues were there to protect the bar. Elsa, who spoke English with confidence, explained that, no, the images were for decoration, 'to remind us that God is with us'" (Faier 2009, 67).

In the early 90s, Filipino Catholics began establishing their own ethnic communities in several parishes in the Archdiocese of Tokyo as many Japanese parish priests started to acknowledge the presence and contribution of Filipinos in forwarding growth of the church. The Japanese priests began opening the church doors to Filipinos and allowed them both the space and time (schedule) to have their own Filipino/English mass or any religio-cultural liturgical events. Their celebratory presence somehow animated the church and provided warmth that contrasted the cold, formal, and ritual-specific Japanese liturgy. From an institutional standpoint, the Archdiocese created the Catholic Tokyo International Center (CTIC) in 1990 to serve the needs of foreign Catholics. A number of Filipino-cause-oriented offices had also been established, particularly the Franciscan Philippine Center (FPC), to help not only the spiritual and pastoral needs of the Filipinos, but also with their legal, marital and social predicament. Some Filipino priests and lay missionaries came to Japan and initiated programs and activities to empower these Japan-based Filipinas. Beginning in the late 1990s, many of these Filipinas got married to Japanese nationals and started having families of their own. Possessing a more stable and permanent resident status as "spouses of Japanese nationals," these Filipinas ventured into a more active and bigger religious commitment beyond Sunday mass participation. Soon, Filipino Catholics extended their stay in their respective churches and participated into more active roles as lay leaders, mass readers, altar servers, choir members, and lay catechists among others. With their legal status more permanent and family duties more pronounced, there was enough reason to be more involved in parish activities than their earlier life of instability and uncertainty as contract-based (illegal) workers.

From the mid-90s to early 2000s, several parishes in the Archdiocese of Tokyo have recognized the presence and contribution of the Filipino communities. In some parishes, a Filipino representation in the parochial council has been a regular fixture. Tagalog masses have been introduced in few parishes in Chiba prefecture. English masses and international masses and gatherings have become more common than ever. Mass booklets that bear trilingual (Nihongo, English, and Filipino) renditions have been printed and distributed to many parishes. Philippine festivals and fiestas of religious icons like the Sto. Nino, the Virgin Mary, and other saints have been reintroduced even among Japanese Catholics. Inter-gathering and network of various Filipino- church based communities have been formed and created like the MICHIKOTO United that comprises the Filipino communities of Matsudo, Ichikawa, Koiwa, and Toyoshiki as well as the CTIC-sanctioned Gathering of Filipino Communities and Groups (GFGC) that coordinates Archdiocesan and CTIC programs with Filipino Catholics in all parishes.

Post-2005: A Struggle for Longevity, Sustainability, and Full Integration

The stricter border control for Filipino entertainers since 2005 had significantly decreased the influx of prospective new members for Filipino church-based communities. Together with a thorough campaign to drive out Filipino over-stayers and illegal workers, these parochial communities felt its impact, as many of their active members, mostly men, had been caught, arrested, and deported back to the Philippines. For a time, this massive drive against illegal workers greatly affected many Filipino Catholic communities. The communities diminished in membership, and many Filipinos who feared getting caught or questioned by authorities when in public avoided going to churches. Reduced but resilient, the remaining "legally staying" members continued with their religious activities and hoped that the future may be bright with the promise of new breed of members who can continue what they have started.

The first source of optimism rests on their Catholic-baptized bicultural children, most of whom have grown familiar with the Filipino brand of religious expressions. Add to that is the

increasing number of Filipino trainees who have been actively participating in most religious activities especially Sunday masses. Although contract-based for a maximum of three years without guarantee of return or renewal, any departure is often replaced by an arrival of a new batch. For now, their presence has provided a significant support in buffering the deflating membership. New members can also come from a new type of Filipino migrant worker: the Filipino nurses and caregivers. Starting in 2006, Japan has opened its healthcare industry to employment of Filipino healthcare professionals; however, it will be discussed later that it has not significantly impacted the Filipino religious demographic due to low turnout of Filipinos choosing to work in Japan. Just recently, Japan has also allowed foreign housekeepers or nannies to enter Japan with a working visa, but this too cannot offer significant remedy. As it turns out, this type of visa is only open for foreign (non-Japanese) employers who hold certain types of visas, like those in diplomatic work, executive and business managerial positions, and legal and accounting jobs. Hence, working visas for housekeepers or nannies are still limited and highly selective. With the so-called new blood of Filipino Catholics significantly scarce and temporarily buffered only by the presence of contractual Filipinos, the problem of longevity is pressingly urgent.

More than a decade after 2005, the usual active members are aging and their bicultural children have grown to be less interested in Filipino cultural identity including its religio-cultural norms and expressions. They have become more Japanese than Filipinos not only in language and cultural orientation, but also in terms of religious belief and affiliation. Furthermore, with JPEPA's provision for Filipino healthcare workers, a new breed of migrants is expected to fill this demographic vacuum within Filipino Catholic communities; however, the turnout has not been good. First, it has not attracted a lot of Filipino healthcare professionals, who are more attracted to work in English-speaking countries that also pay more (Kingston 2011). Second, even when most of them hurdled the language training and professional licensing examination in Japan, many them ended up returning to the Philippines due to work-related conditions and psycho-social stress (Calunsod 2016). Impact-wise, the arrival of few Filipino healthcare workers has not been ideally contributive and significant to church life and dynamics; obviously not in the same degree as the *Japayuki-san* exodus of the earlier years. While male trainees abound, they have been rarely seen in churches and religious gatherings, as most of them would rather stay home on a Sunday to rest after a week-long back-breaking jobs as menial workers in construction sites, factories, and industries. Or that their short-term contract-based stay in Japan, they construe, would offer nothing significant for these communities in the long run, hence their religious inactivity.

The sustainability of Filipino community is further jeopardized by the lack of interest from the bicultural children, and there are several reasons why they are not as religious as their mothers are. First, it is normative in Japanese youth society to be nonreligious or to be not affiliated with any religion. Shintoism and Buddhism may have been traditionally ingrained in their societal dynamics but are viewed more as cultural traditions than for their religious/spiritual significance. As LeFebvre (2015, 197) notes: "Being nonreligious is synonymously considered by Japanese with 'normal' (*futsu*)." As these children of Filipinas immerse into Japanese society, they absorb everything that is trending including nonreligiosity, that is, even if they have been raised by their mothers as Catholic. Second, there is also a huge influence exerted by the non-Catholic household where these bicultural children live when their Japanese fathers and even their grandmothers would somehow discredit or downplay Catholicism or Western religion as unimportant. In this domestic space, Filipina mothers would struggle to find a way to bring along their kids with them in going to church. Vicky, a forty-year-old Filipina mother to two bicultural kids, shares: "Oftentimes, I would lie about going to church with my kids. I would tell my husband that we will just go to my friend's birthday party." Third, school clubs (*bukatsu* or *kurabu*) have forced their young ones to prioritize attending these clubs even on Sundays rather than going with their Filipino mothers to church. When these kids enter the junior high school,

they are required to take part in sports clubs that run for about five or six days of practice a week after school and on weekends and sometimes before school (LeMay 2014). With school clubs even on Sundays, these kids start to grow disinterested in anything religious. Fourth, it may be ironic but, interestingly, it is possible that these kids' indifference to religion is likely caused by their mothers' preferred attendance of English/Tagalog mass even if their kids are Nihongo monolinguals. How does one expect a child to develop fondness for anything that is foreign and incomprehensible to him/her? Drawing from a study by Ebaugh and Chafetz (2000, 447) in the United States, it shows how immigrant congregations have alienated their young members in their use of native language in religious gatherings: "In general, it appears that congregations that focus most strongly on recreating the ethnic ambiance of the old country are most likely to alienate their youth. The dilemma for ethnic congregations is that the very ambiance, including the extensive informal and formal use of the native tongue, that constitutes their most attractive feature to immigrant members, alienates their Americanized offspring."

Viewed from the social context of Japan, it is logical to believe that these Nihongo-speaking bicultural children find themselves unrecognized, unappreciated, and ignored as they are "forcefully" brought to a non-Japanese mass or religious gathering. In this way, it would make sense for them to legitimize their choice of nonreligiosity later in life. When these young people are left confused with the choice of where to ethnoreligiously belong—Japanese or Filipino—they would opt for what is most convenient, and that is to be nonreligious or to be neither of them. Not an anti-religion stance but a mere pragmatic position to adopt in a highly secular Japanese society, being nonreligious gives them more freedom to navigate the complicated realm of social norms and ethos without the strictures of religious constraints and law. Besides, Japanese postwar society has not been too keen on endorsing or promoting any religious belief or affiliation.

To summarize, a historicized narration of the Filipino Catholics' religious existence since their migration in 1979 until now has shown an interesting twist. Pre-2005 demography had seen plentiful members who were young and active but, due to their residence status as mostly sojourners, returnees, and repeaters, their participation in churches was irregular, temporary, and short-term. It failed to provide stability, as most of them merely go to church for mass and religious activities but were not too keen on becoming active members of the Church, thinking that their stay in Japan would not last long enough to justify spending additional effort and time beyond the Sunday mass obligation. For many of them, they would rather spend their limited free time sleeping and relaxing than extending their religious time beyond the Sunday mass; besides, most of them still had to work in the evening as entertainers in night bars. Post-2005, Filipinos have attained a more stable presence as long-term residents who are housewives to Japanese men and/or (grand)mothers to children with Japanese ancestry. They have attained a certain degree of stability with Filipino communities, obtaining formal recognition from the Archdiocese and parishes with representation in most parochial councils and whose community- initiated activities like Christmas parties, fund-raising drives, etc. getting the much-deserved support from parish priests and Japanese counterparts. Overall, theirs is not only recognized, but is also generally treated with respect and appreciation. Their strong fiducial and spiritual fervor embedded in their usually festive religious expressions have brought a unique kind of soul and life to the Church of Japan, which is envisioned to have a multicultural image due to increasing presence of Catholic migrants. In the face of this positive development, the Filipino communities' emerging problem, however, is the lack of fresh blood—new members who can continue what they have started. The irony of events sees the pre-2005 phase as a struggle for recognition and stability when there were plenty of young and active members, although they were temporary, unrecognized, and unstable. Post-2005 sees a stable set of communities but has struggled to recruit or inject new blood for sustainability and longevity. In the end, Filipino Catholics' presence is still a continuing narrative of struggle.

The Aging Members and the Young's Disinterest in Catholicism

The main problem besetting today's Filipino Catholic communities is two-fold: members are aging, and the young ones are not interested in continuing what their mothers have started. Based on recent data from 2015, the Archdiocese of Tokyo has around 99,120 "registered" Catholics from a Tokyo population of around 19 million, which pegged the Catholics a mere 0.5 percent of the entire Tokyo demography (http://www.gcatholic.org/dioceses/diocese/toky0.htm). This number does not, however, detail its ethnic distribution, but it can be surmised that because the basis of the number is the registered names of Catholics in parochial registry, this may only indicate the number of Japanese Catholics. Why? It is because most Filipinos have historically failed, either intentionally or inadvertently, to register themselves in a specific parish. When asked, many of them said that they were not totally aware, while there are some who ignored it thinking that it would cost them money because of the monthly tithes that are required to any officially registered member of a parish. Moreover, they also justified their decision because they see themselves as not tied to any single parish due to their preference to hop from one church to another in search of a religious activity or Sunday mass that is offered in a linguistic medium that they understand.

In desire to at least guess the estimated demography of Filipino Catholics in Japan, the author roughly collates the 2010 Philippine National Statistics Office (NSO) census with the 2014 statistics provided by the Japanese Government. The 2010 NSO places the percentage of Catholics in the Philippines at 80.6 percent, while the Japan's Justice Ministry mentioned in 2014 that around 229,595 Filipinos stayed in Japan (Murai 2016). It follows that 80.6 percent of 217,585 roughly puts the number of Catholics in Japan around 185,054. A huge chunk of this group are women who are spouses of Japanese nationals or divorced from them but have attained a long-term resident visa. Mostly married in the 1980s and 1990s, they are aging and their children have become less dependent upon them, allowing them more time to be present in religious and sociocultural events.

Mostly in their fifties, these Filipinas have had little formal education, especially regarding Catholic faith and theology. Except for some of their elected leaders and officers who have attained at least a tertiary education from Japan or Philippines, they have elementary knowledge of Church teachings that requires updating. Therefore, when Filipino priests or lay theologians and catechists would provide catechetical sessions or short courses on particular topics, there is an air of excitement among many of them. A Filipino priest based in one Tokyo parish described most Filipino Catholics as "*uhaw*" (thirsty): "They thirst for Church teachings, they thirst for love and intimacy from their Japanese husbands, they thirst for the presence of their loved ones back home in the Philippines."

There is not much to do when it comes to the aging Filipino Catholics because the same predicament is obviously observed among Japanese Catholics, whose average age is in the sixties. In fact, a Japanese professor predicted that in a decade or so from now, both the communities of Filipino Catholics and Japanese Catholics would significantly suffer a downfall of membership because if current church attendance is to be based, it has shown a not-so-good outlook for the future of the Church of Japan. Indeed, the Catholic demography may not only be aging; it is "dying."

Just like any institution or community, its promise of longevity and sustainability is hinged upon its young members. The problem is with the lack of new members coming from outside as migrants, and their young blood has not guaranteed a promising future with their lack of regard for anything Catholic or religious. If mass participation is in any way an indication, there is a dearth of young people in the Catholic Church of Japan hugely outnumbered by the old and aging churchgoers. This may be explained by the idea that people's religiosity increases with age (Myers 2000; Stark and Bainbridge 1987); hence, the larger number of old people, the overwhelming absence of the young, and their strong disinterest to religion divest any optimistic

outlook of the future of the Church. To hope that when they get old they will resort back to their religion of baptism and restore continuity of the Catholic Church in Japan is not a guarantee. They rarely or never go to Sunday mass, and if they do, they have little or no understanding of the content of their faith, since any form of religious education is constitutionally disallowed in postwar Japan. It does not help that structural prescriptions from schools like strict attendance of school clubs has contributed to disinterest of kids in religion, especially when they enter junior high school (LeMay 2014). In the end, their disinterest to participate in anything religious is a personal decision or preference that is aptly supported and conditioned by societal and structural systems that are in place in public spaces, particularly in schools.

Given this difficult context through which Filipino Catholics express their religious belief and practices, it is a real challenge. The nonreligious challenge to Filipino religiosity forces the immigrants to negotiate and adjust if only to express their faith and belong to a religion. Despite their attainment of a certain degree of stability and recognition, their struggle for sustainability is still smeared with on-going challenges of cultural differences with the host Japanese Catholics. From a native country where Catholicism is the norm to a host country where it is considered a religious minority, their adjustment involves reappropriation of certain liturgical practices, given the very distinct Japanese sociocultural norms, increased lay involvement due to lack of priests, better management of work schedule since Sunday is not a declared holiday, and a domestic role in which Japanese husbands and bicultural kids are less supportive and even resistant to anything Catholic or religious. At home, in the workplace, and in public spaces, Filipino Catholics in Japan can hardly express their religious agenda, as they are socially constrained from doing so. It is only in the ecclesial space of parishes during Sunday masses and gatherings or in the company of their fellow Filipinos during block rosaries and home evangelization visitations where they can be Filipinos as well as Catholics.

Toward a Multicultural Church: The Call for Full Integration

In its search to find a solution to this predicament, the Archdiocese of Tokyo has encouraged a more welcoming attitude towards non-Japanese Catholics by adopting a multicultural model in its ecclesiological identity through a proposal of "full integration." Ideal and encouraging as it sounds, there is still an air of ambiguity or confusion among both the Japanese and non-Japanese Catholics on how this set-up would actually impact their own ethnoreligious communities. Macaraan (2017, 150) suggests that despite its ambiguity, what is clear is it does not intend to simply combine multiple ethnic groups into one homogenous group. Despite its lack of clarity, there is an air of optimism among all groups knowing that their institutional leadership is keen on promoting an environment that accepts diversity and allows a space for their bicultural children in particular to address their confusing state and identity.

Recently, there have been encouraging signs toward achieving this vision. Filipino Catholics and those from other ethnic minorities have been recognized by many parishes. Generally labelled as "international groups," English Sunday masses have been provided for them, and they have been invited to parish leadership council meetings, parochial festivities, fairs, and more. Although predominantly Filipino, there is mutual dialogue and respect between and among them, and this attitudinal and behavioral ethos are also reflected in the way Japanese Catholics interact with the international groups. Parish priests, including the Japanese priests, have also welcomed their presence.

What can be said for now is despite its ambiguity, the Archdiocese of Tokyo's call for "full integration" has already opened the doors of their once "gated" communities. Gradually, young people have seen more initiatives to address their own concern of confusion through Sunday catechetical sessions, religious camps, pilgrimages, and block rosaries. Ethnoreligious communities have increased and regularized their interactions through parochial meetings and gatherings, cultural presentations, parish-initiated fairs, church cleaning activities, feast day celebrations, and sacramental celebrations. With continued interactions by parishioners and the

support provided by the institutional leadership, this article argues that any ambiguity that "full integration" contains in terms of definition may just be merely theoretical because in practice, there is already a growing spirit of multicultural church in parish communities where each community looks at other ethnic groups as partners and friends. It is a praxis of intercultural harmony that neither dissolves distinct cultural practices nor hegemonically patronizes one's own culture to the detriment of others. There is an environment that is open for promotion of one's own space and dialogue between and among them. The praxis is both culturally preserving and culturally dialogical, to treat culture as a way to preserve identity and promote it as well to create shared space for interaction and dialogue.

Conclusion

The Filipino Catholics' entry in Japan's socio-religious consciousness suggests a long history of negotiation and struggle. Before 2005, Filipinos were struggling to attain recognition from the Japanese Church. Their unstable residential status in the past has offered little help in stabilizing their religious presence in most parishes in the Archdiocese of Tokyo. By 2005 and beyond, Filipino Catholics achieved stability and recognition, but due to an aging population and lack of religious fervor from their bicultural children, the post-2005 narrative has shifted into a struggle for longevity and sustainability. The context, as shown in this article, includes the historicized narrative of struggle of Filipino Catholics.

In the light of this current struggle, the Archdiocese of Tokyo sets a vision of a fully integrated Church that adopts an image of a multicultural Church given the presence of migrant Catholics aside from Filipinos. From the collective stand of Filipino Catholics, the call for full integration is an attractive one; however, the ambiguity that surrounds the whole idea of this vision slows down the process. Others have various misconceptions; this is expected, due to the ambiguity that the vision projects. Despite its theoretical ambiguity, the praxis, as observed, has shown promise. The provision for a welcoming environment and the support given by institutional leaders have encouraged more interactions and exchanges between and among ethnoreligious communities. In the end, it is hoped that this article's analysis of Filipino Catholics' historicized narrative of struggle is that it can be utilized by Archdiocesan policy-framers as well as similar entities when tasked to address the full potential of a vision of a multicultural church of Japan through "full integration."

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