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A Negotiated Existence of the Filipino Catholics in the Archdiocese of Tokyo

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Abstract: Although many studies have focused on the plight of Filipino migrant workers in Japan since the phenomenon of Japayuki-san started in 1979 and the so-called "brides of Asia" in the mid-80's, most, if not all, of them were on accounts of the Filipinos' socio-spatial presence in the secular realm of Japanese society. There is a dearth of scholarly articulation and analysis of a similar narrative of contestation within the sacred space of Japan, that is, within the ecclesial space of Japan's Catholic parishes/churches. Hence, this study takes it upon itself to explore this often-ignored public space.

In this study, selected churches in the Archdiocese of Tokyo with strong and established Filipino presence were visited in a span of ten month-qualitative study that includes participant observation, interviews, and immersion. In the light of Loic Wacquant's theorization of urban ghetto, this paper argues that the negotiated existence of Filipino Catholics in Japan has over time achieved a significant evolution from a status of "sworded victim" to an empowered "shielded enclave" where changing demographics and migration flows have pushed the Archdiocese to call for "full integration". But understood with ambiguity and accepted with caution, any integrative initiative remains until now a confusing and divisive activity not unless "full integration" is well explicated and defined. In addition, full integration must always respect cultural nuances of ethnoreligious groups as well as open themselves to facilitation of a shared space between and among participating nations.

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